



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 94.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S WATER-GAUNTLET

OR
THE MYSTERY-MAN'S TALISMAN



BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

AS BUFFALO BILL LET DRIVE WITH HIS REPEATER, THE REDSKIN IN THE PROW OF THE WAR CANOE THREW HIS ARMS WILDLY IN THE AIR.



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OR,

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CHAPTER I.

BUFFALO BILL AND WILD BILL ON THE TRAIL.

It was hard work paddling the small Indian birch-bark canoe against the swift current of the narrow stream, and one of the two occupants unshipped his paddle with a cry of disgust.

"Guess we locate right here, Buffler; I'm dog-tired," he said.

"As you like, Bill. We've pulled twenty miles since sunrise. That's satisfactory. And now for dinner."

So saying, Buffalo Bill, by a dexterous movement, sent the little craft skimming over the stream into a tiny creek, sheltered from the direct rays of the sun by dense evergreen foliage.

His companion climbed on to the bank, and brought the prow of the canoe up a small, grassy ledge, fastening it by a tough strip of green hide to a portion of the gnarled root of a gigantic redwood tree.

The two scouts—William Cody and J. B. Hikok, better known as Wild Bill—were in the heart of that mysterious and little-known region, the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Their reason for being there on that particular June day was strange enough to merit something more than passing notice.

They were in quest of a lost party of miners, who had

set forth, some six months before, ostensibly to locate the much-talked-of "Wall of Gold Mine," a fabulously rich mine, but which had previously exacted the toll of scores of human lives. Some of the best and bravest had left their bones to whiten on the mysterious Sierras, in a bold, but fruitless, search for that golden treasure—the Eldorado of every miner in the West.

The Wall of the Gold Mine was said to be situated in a gloomy valley filled with mysterious ruins, relics of a vanished race, which history and tradition alike had failed to take account of.

Nothing was known concerning those mysterious people, who had been succeeded in turn by Toltecs and Aztecs, until these had succumbed before the fierce and relentless red man.

Until this day, the red man held the heart of the Sierras, contesting inch by inch the possession of his magnificent hunting-grounds, rich in game of every description, from the unconquerable grizzly and fierce buffalo, to the noisy coyote and agile squirrel.

Timber in abundance and every variety of fruit were at his disposal; gold in astounding quantities he enjoyed, and had lately come to value it in proportion to the amount of "fire-water" it secured for him.

But even "fire-water" had failed to tempt the red man from his mountain fastness. He would barter and ex-

change, but no inducement was strong enough to make him quit those hunting-grounds.

On this account, the heart of the Sierras had remained as a closed book to all but a few lucky pioneers, who, having penetrated their mysterious depths, had returned laden with a rich golden spoil.

The tales they told of encounters with an unknown race of Indians, of gold in such abundance that "washing" was unnecessary—indeed, a waste of time—coupled with the actual production of immense nuggets, yielding a percentage higher than any others in the richest fields of California, fired the gambling instinct of their hearers, and produced a "rush" for this wondrous Eldorado.

From that day dated the fierce hostility of the Shoshone Indians. Separate parties of miners were massacred, others were forced to return, having lost all they possessed, broken in health and spirits.

One man only succeeded, and got back to tell the tale, and by him the mine had received its name—the Wall of Gold.

The settlers of Long Pine appropriately dubbed him "Lucky Jack."

They did more, for thirty of the most influential miners in the settlement put their earnings together, and, procuring the finest and most complete outfit that money could buy, they placed themselves under "Lucky Jack's" leadership, and took the trail with the avowed purpose of establishing a settlement in the vicinity of the Wall of Gold Mine.

Being men of substance, and good citizens, they prevailed on the military authorities to afford them the protection of a small mounted troop.

Thus, numbering nearly fifty souls, the band, adequately equipped for all the dangers and difficulties of the trail, had ridden hopefully out from Long Pine one bright December day.

Since then, more than six months had elapsed, bringing no tidings from either citizens or soldiers.

Nothing could be gleaned from the grimly taciturn Indians, and the authorities, becoming anxious, had attacked the Shoshone Indians, with disastrous results.

The force dispatched suffered defeat, and the red man, emboldened by success, swooped down upon the settlements, massacring and pillaging whenever the opportunity occurred.

The timely arrival of several regiments of infantry, however, taught them a severe lesson, and forced them back into their own hunting-grounds. Nevertheless, they remained practically unassailable here, and, in consequence, it was deemed advisable at headquarters to adopt other tactics to discover the fate of the missing band of pioneers.

This change took shape in giving Colonel Cody and his companion scout, J. B. Hikok, generally known as Wild Bill, a free hand.

Their long and thrilling experience with Indians in every part of the great Far West, rendered them peculiarly fit for the present enterprise, and when, true to their principles of working with the least possible incumbrance, they decided to make the trail by themselves, the authorities wisely refrained from offering any objection on the score of paucity of numbers.

Their preparations consisted in getting together a light,

but suitable, equipment of arms and ammunition, retaining for their own comfort merely one blanket apiece and a serviceable shotgun, for bringing down small winged game. These articles, packed in a small birch-bark canoe, completed their outfit, and were ample, so they judged, to insure the success of their project.

A fortnight had elapsed since their start. As they had resolved to make the trail by water, and since success depended in large measure upon their capacity for eluding the Indians, especially during the initial stage of the journey, their rate of progress was necessarily slow.

So far their efforts to escape notice had been crowned with success.

Agreeably fatigued after the stiff morning's pull, Buffalo Bill, having ascertained that they were in no danger of an immediate surprise, indulged in the luxury of a pipe, while his companion proceeded to make a small fire.

"Here goes ther last bit o' meat from ther larder. We air cleaned dry arter this, pard," said Wild Bill, with a laugh, placing in a row of heated stones a tenderloin steak taken from a fine fat buck, which had fallen to his rifle on the previous day.

The meat was soon cooked, and, being washed down with some well-sugared black coffee, made a very appetizing and substantial meal.

For an hour or more the two scouts remained in the secluded creek, smoking hard, and exchanging occasionally a few remarks.

The wild grandeur of their surroundings impressed them, and neither was in the mood to be communicative.

Through a break in the timber upon the opposite bank of the swift stream, there opened up a vista of forest, stream and canyon, intermingling in a manner peculiar only to that district.

Gigantic redwood trees raised their dark and lofty crests from the steep side of a gloomy canyon.

These trees, the monarchs of the forest, attain their grandest proportions in the Sierras, where the average measurement is ninety feet in girth, and over three hundred feet in height.

Hard by, one of these giants of the forest towered up above the small creek occupied by the two scouts.

Its massive trunk rose upward sheer two hundred feet before throwing out a single branch.

The rays of the sun fell aslant its shaggy crest, but failed to penetrate to the resting men.

They were grateful for the shelter, and might have enjoyed it longer, had not their empty larder called for speedy replenishment. It wanted some hours till sundown, and in the interval they would have to procure sufficient meat to last them a week, since the less they were compelled to hunt, the better would be their chances of keeping clear of the Indians. Nevertheless, it was patent to both that they would soon have to strike one of the Indian trails, in order to attain the object of their journey.

Wild Bill was the first to move.

"I guess I'll take a scout around, pard," he said. "Bunch an' buffler-grass are rare plentiful back o' this crik, an' if we don't light into a bunch o' prong-horns some soon, I ain't no hunter, nor never was."

"Good! Then I'll overhaul the guns," agreed his companion.

Left to himself, Buffalo Bill proved as good as his word, and long before Wild Bill returned, the rifles had been cleaned and reloaded. Moreover, the supplies in the little craft were so placed that everything was in readiness for an immediate start when the time arrived.

In order that no keen-sighted Indian should discover the canoe in their absence, Buffalo Bill drew it well up under the shelter of the evergreen foliage, rearranging the grass in such a manner that their recent presence on the little bank would never so much as be suspected.

Then, since an hour had elapsed, and Wild Bill had not returned, he pushed cautiously through the thick underbrush, and, picking up his companion's trail, proceeded with great care to obliterate it.

The towering redwood, rising like a giant above the post-oaks, pines and walnuts, would afford them an infallible landmark for regaining the canoe.

He was still busy hiding Wild Bill's tracks, when the latter glided into view at the end of an oak glade, some two hundred yards to the right.

Stopping short, Wild Bill signed to Buffalo Bill to come quickly up.

"Buffler," he whispered, when Cody joined him; "we've got ter look sort o' lively. Behind this yere timber I've nosed a bunch o' prong-horns, jest prime; but there's a fresh trail o' red varmints, and I calculate they ar' giving up the game theirselves."

To Buffalo Bill this was ominous of failure, since it meant their rifles would be useless, for a single shot would set the redskins on the alert, and that was a contingency not to be risked.

Very few of the Shoshone Indians possessed firearms; yet it was possible, if the pioneers, whose fate the scouts were seeking to ascertain, had really been destroyed, the present band of redskins might possess guns.

Quickly, yet with absolute stealth, the two scouts moved from the cover of the timber into the long, thick bunch-grass growing to the top of a slight acclivity, from the summit of which Wild Bill had made his observation.

The climb, though by no means tedious, was much longer than it looked, and considerably more than half an hour elapsed ere they gained the summit.

From this point of vantage the scene changed with bewildering suddenness.

On all sides the timber-clad mountains appeared to recede into the far distance, giving place to a wide, billowy valley, rich with bunch and buffalo-grass, yet strangely broken up by steep-sided canyons here and there, shimmering patches of water, and mottes of post-oak, walnut and pine.

Right ahead, in the very eyes of the sun, and at a distance of two miles from their vantage point, the scouts beheld a group of ten or twelve antelopes feeding in the midst of a small, well-sheltered hollow.

The wind, blowing at right angles across the valley, would necessitate a pretty considerable detour in order to approach the animals unnoticed.

If the redskins, whose trail was distinctly visible across the top of the acclivity, were bent on the chase, they would be found somewhere to the right, between a distant wall of timber and the browsing game.

Instinctively, both scouts scanned the valley in that direction.

Yet the most careful scrutiny failed to disclose the smallest sign of a human foe.

Nevertheless, the trail hard by showed that a band of Shoshones, some fifty strong, had passed the spot not more than three hours before; and, in view of their fondness for the chase, only some very strong counter-attraction could keep them off.

"It's dead cert ther varmints ar' nosing around that hollow, Buffler," whispered Wild Bill, bringing his eyes slowly over the intervening space between the distant timber and the antelopes.

"You won't find them in that manner," was Cody's reply.

"Better watch the prong-horns; they'll be quick enough to scent the redskins when the latter get close enough."

"Look! look! What do you make out now?"

An arrow had suddenly shot into the midst of the deer, and one of the animals fell.

Instantly the rest broke away in one uniform bound, coming in the direction of the watchful scouts.

With necks craned forth, and legs seemingly doubled up, the animals raced along at lightning speed.

At one and the same moment, there broke from the cover of the tall bunch-grass, to the right of the scouts and closer than either had suspected, a small band of Shoshone Indians, each warrior being armed with a long war-lance and bow and arrows.

With the agility of practiced huntsmen, the redskins let fly a dozen flint-tipped arrows.

The foremost antelope bounded into the air and dropped back in its tracks.

Two others rolled over, one of them mortally wounded, but the other merely disabled, for, bounding up, it made a plucky effort to regain the flying herd.

All this passed before the scouts in swift succession.

The excitement of the chase ahead made their pulses throb, and their fingers itched to pull trigger on the flying game, but since the act would undoubtedly have proven fatal to themselves, they were forced to lie still and inactive.

On came the racing herd of antelopes, followed by the fleet-footed human foe.

They were making almost in a bee line for the spot occupied by the watching scouts.

"Say, pard, if we can't 'pull,' I guess we orter scoot. We ain't aiming ter let them red varmints drop slap inter us," whispered Wild Bill, edging quietly and imperceptibly backward.

"Too late," returned Buffalo Bill.

"We'll have to make tracks along the Shoshones' trail, and make them very quickly, too."

So saying, he commenced to wriggle backward along the trail running parallel to the top of the acclivity.

Nor was his companion slow to adopt this modified arrangement.

Holding their rifles in such a manner that they could be used at a moment's notice, the two scouts made rapid progress backward.

Being hidden by the tall grass, they were unable to note the swift approach of the flying herd.

Notwithstanding, as the sounds of the chase became more audible, they were able to time their own movements in order to secure some degree of safety.

Quitting the trail, they wormed themselves into a thick tussock of tall, rank grass, where detection would be exceedingly difficult.

This shelter, however, was not reached a second too soon, for they had not settled themselves, when the leader of the herd—a magnificent bull—came plunging over the crest, barely a dozen yards from their place of concealment.

He offered a splendid mark, and it was hard to let the opportunity slip, and with something like a sigh of regret, the watchers beheld the animal go racing down the slope toward the water.

He was followed by another and another, and then by the whole herd, bunched close together.

Simultaneously a storm of arrows swept the acclivity, and three more animals rolled over.

One of the flint-tipped missiles struck the middle of the grass tussock and penetrated the ground to a depth of several inches.

"Them varmints ain't fur off, Buffler, I engage to bet," said Wild Bill, nosing his rifle gently through the grass, and keeping his eyes fixed on the long crest line ahead.

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill, seeing that his companion was ready for any contingency, directed his efforts to removing the arrow, lest the upstanding feathered shaft should attract one of the warriors to the spot.

Finding it impossible, however, to remove the barbed head, he broke the shaft in two, and quickly rearranged the top of the grass.

All at once a faintly-muttered exclamation from Wild Bill caused him to desist.

The position he occupied in the tussock was not so good for observation as his companion's, and it was not till seven or eight panting redskins had gained the top of the acclivity that any of them became visible to him.

A glance showed them to be warriors of note, each being decked out in full warpaint and feathers, while each wore a wampum of scalps, freshly taken.

The long, lank, black hair of Apache Indians, mingled horribly with various shades of shorter hair, speaking grimly and unmistakably of white victims.

Their long, glittering war-lances were, near the keen-pointed tops, also decorated in grewsome fashion with the scalps of their human victims.

Buffalo Bill eyed these gory trophies with more than passing interest, being anxious to discover some clew to the fate of the Wall of Gold pioneers.

The fact, however, that none of the savage warriors carried any but native weapons tended to puzzle him. Nor did they remain long enough within his range of vision for him to discover whether the scalps of their white victims were of comparatively recent acquisition.

Those of the Apaches were unmistakably fresh.

From this circumstance, he was inclined to think that the present band were returning to their head village after a successful encounter with their hereditary foe.

Waiting till several minutes had elapsed from the time of their disappearance, he whispered to Wild Bill.

But the latter made no response.

Again he essayed to attract his companion's attention, and again failed.

It occurred to him, all at once, that Wild Bill might have followed the enemy.

In a moment a thousand and one possibilities flashed upon him.

Worming cautiously through the tough, strong grass, he found Wild Bill's place of concealment empty.

But it was not difficult to note the latter's trail through the crushed and broken grass beyond.

Following it up, he was surprised to find his companion lying prone, and to all appearance lifeless, since an arrow had pierced his jacket and pinned him down.

The thought that their presence was known for the moment stunned Cody. He cast a swift glance around. The seven or eight warriors whom he had first observed were at the bottom of the slope approaching the oak glade leading down to the stream.

The arrow piercing his motionless companion had been fired from that direction, as the veriest tyro could observe by the angle formed by its feathered shaft.

With a sense of heavy foreboding, he turned his gaze down the valley where the chase had first begun.

Two or three dozen braves were moving up in an extended line, doubtless to dress the meat which the warriors had secured. In ten, or fifteen minutes, at the most, they would gain the top of the acclivity.

He had scarcely made this discovery when the distant report of firearms drew his gaze once more toward the vicinity of the oak glade.

"Buffler, did yew hear that?"

The hurried whisper came from Wild Bill.

"Thank Heaven you live!" ejaculated Cody, wriggling snakewise up to his companion.

"Did you hear that gun?" Wild Bill repeated, in quick, incisive tones.

"Yes; but the fact that you lived knocked its significance clean out of mind. Can it be one of the pioneers?"

"No, Buffler; yew kin bet on it them pioneers is dead meat long ago. It's ther varmint who pinned me down here. Jest examine the arrer—it ain't a hunting one; it's a p'izoned arrer, or I ain't no jedger."

Very carefully, yet deftly, Cody removed the deadly missile, whose fine-tipped barb had escaped his companion's body by considerably less than an inch.

Its make differed from any he had beheld, and might by the most seasoned backwoodsman have been mistaken for a hunting-arrow till the barb was examined, when the difference at once became patent, and the deadly poison was seen.

"This means we have been discovered."

"I calculate ther's about ther size of it, Buffler. But this ain't no time for powwowing. Them varmints is due back here some soon. I guess we strike along the red's trail, and work round to the crick."

And this plan was successfully adopted.

By the time the two scouts had regained the shelter of the oak glade the Shoshone braves had removed the choicest bits from the fallen prong-horns and departed with the warriors.

Though Buffalo Bill was thirsting to know how Wild Bill had come by his narrow escape, the exigencies of the moment allowed his companion no opportunity to explain.

Helping themselves to the best of such portions of the game as the Indians had left behind, they were able to re-

plenish their larder with a stock sufficient for several days.

One thing was certain—their canoe had not been espied.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRAIL OF WILD BILL'S ASSAILANT.

"See here, pard, I guess these ar' the varmint's tracks," Wild Bill explained, with suppressed excitement, as, pushing back the undergrowth, he exposed the impression of a pair of moccasins on the moist ground.

Buffalo Bill examined them eagerly; for, judging by the nature of the impression, the moccasins were of a size and pattern unknown to him, there being several curious indentations which attracted his notice and baffled all his attempts to explain. Nor was Wild Bill a whit less puzzled.

"I only knows, pard, thet ther varmint what made them tracks warn't much darker than yew or me.

"Ther first time I fixed a glim on him, he war nosing around ther top of yonder bluff, jest back o' ther oak glade. He war standin' slick out in ther sunlight, a-seem'ing mighty interested in them hunting warriors. These varmints were powerful busy slittin' ther throats of their game down the bottom of ther slope.

"Tween watchin' ther two, I guess I got fixed; anyways, ther red fiend kinder marked me fer dead meat."

"He must have seen us enter the tussock," mused Cody, noting particularly the direction taken by the mysterious tracks.

"In that case, possibly he sent the first arrow into our midst."

"I'm open to gamble on it," agreed Wild Bill.

Together they climbed the steep side of the small bluff where the mysterious Indian had first been seen.

This bluff stood at the southern extremity of the oak glade, in the middle of a natural clearing, but so well sheltered by the surrounding foliage as to be unnoticeable until one was actually upon it.

Steep, rocky sides, tufted here and there with grass and some creeping vine, were succeeded by a smooth, moss-covered surface of oval shape, containing a small hollow in the center, where further signs of the mysterious Indian were evident.

However, nothing of any considerable importance was gleaned, and since it wanted but an hour to sundown, Buffalo Bill decided to follow up the strange redskin's trail as rapidly as possible.

It was a risky enterprise, for, whoever the redskin might be, he would of a surety inform the Shoshone Indians of the discovery he had made, and the whole band of braves and warriors might be expected to swarm down to the stream, seeking for the daring paleface intruders.

Nevertheless, there was method in this seemingly mad enterprise, since Cody's experience went to show that no redskin cares to make light of his particular qualities.

The present one might be a medicine-man, or some chief, in which case he would be most likely to acquaint the rest with his discovery when all were around the camp-fire.

Buffalo Bill was, in this instance, both right and wrong; for, after following the trail till darkness closed down, the two scouts found themselves in the neighborhood of the Shoshones' camp.

That something unusual was proceeding, there needed no second glance to divine.

The camp-fire blazed up merrily on the edge of the timber-ridge, which the scouts had observed early in the afternoon.

The spoil of the chase was roasting, throwing off an odor so savory that it made the two friends' mouths water.

The camp, however, was held by less than half a dozen braves. And the question immediately occurred to the two scouts—what of the others?

Had they been informed of the presence of the white men, and were they already endeavoring to steal a march upon the latter?

It looked so.

Yet the roasting meat was sufficient testimony that the band could not be far away.

Suddenly Wild Bill nudged his companion, and drew his attention to a faint glow flickering through the trees.

Almost at the same moment there broke upon the ears of the two scouts the muffled tones of a weird shout.

It was followed by several sharp yells, which, in turn, were succeeded by silence most profound.

Then, with uncanny swiftness, a deep red glow leaped up from the depths of the timber.

The transition from dark to light, though but momentary, had enabled the two scouts to perceive in the deep gloom of the timber a crowd of befeathered redskins.

"Some darned medicine-man is foolin' them Injuns," whispered Wild Bill, motioning his companion into the pitchy darkness of the timber-ridge.

"The fooling may come presently," returned Buffalo Bill; "but I rather fancy they're making arrow-poison."

He was right; for, as they stole noiselessly forward, they were able to distinguish a triple circle of Indians seated around a smoldering peat fire, supporting in its midst a large earthenware vessel, affixed to a tripod of war-lances.

From the under part of the vessel there streamed a lurid glow, showing that the vessel itself had recently been brought to a white heat, being now in process of cooling.

An Indian of herculean size was moving slowly and deliberately around the inner ring of seated braves.

It was only occasionally that the two watchers could obtain a glimpse of him, but the little they saw led them to conclude that he was the medicine-man in the act of performing some incantation for the edification and bewilderment of the superstitious braves.

By degrees his movements became more rapid, but since they were absolutely noiseless, it was impossible to follow them with anything like accuracy.

The scene was weird in the extreme; and when, at last, in obedience to a signal from the medicine-man, the squatting braves sprang suddenly to their feet and commenced to circle around and around the dimly-glowing peat fire, the two scouts shrank further back into the timber.

It was well for them that they adopted this precaution, since barely a minute elapsed ere a sudden, lurid glare illumined the timber glade.

The earthen vessel had been removed, and the fire stirred into a blaze.

Over fifty cruel faces were exposed to the somber light. Among them, Buffalo Bill recognized the four warriors

he had seen for a brief space in the afternoon. He was pointing out the latter to Wild Bill, when their united attention was once more directed to the central figure.

"That's ther varmint, Buffler, who tried mighty hard to pass in my checks," whispered Wild Bill, with a convulsive grip on his companion's arm. "I could size him up inside a hull crowd of Injuns. He ain't neither Shoshone nor 'Pache, nor a Piuvu red. Durn me, ef I've ever comed across his tribe afore."

The same thought had assailed Buffalo Bill, for the redskin was of finer physique than even a Comanche, while his complexion was considerably lighter than that of any tribe Cody had ever come in contact with.

To what tribe did he belong?

As the puzzling question forced itself upon Buffalo Bill's attention, he was conscious of one of those wonderful flashes of memory which comes to one's aid occasionally at the most critical times.

He recalled a rumor to the effect that the heart of the Sierras was inhabited by a mysterious tribe of Indians, who had never yet come into direct touch with the white pioneers.

Possibly the present medicine-man was a member of this mysterious tribe.

In a few hurried words, Buffalo Bill explained his theory to his companion.

"Anyways, ther varmint carries a shootin'-iron," was the latter's significant comment.

This circumstance had not hitherto forced itself upon Cody's attention; but now, since he had both the opportunity and time to examine the mysterious Indian, he perceived that the latter carried a rifle slung across his shoulders, while something very much like a revolver was stuck into his bearskin belt.

He had scarcely made this discovery, when the object of his scrutiny raised two powerful arms aloft. Instantly the circling Shoshone braves fell to the ground in an attitude expressive of submission and reverence.

The powerful Indian addressed them in the Shoshone tongue:

"Warriors and braves of the Shoshone nation, hearken to the words of the servant of the Great Snake, who rules the thunder, the sky, and the mountains. The Great Snake has made the Shoshones a mighty nation, and yet mightier shall they become.

"The white man has cast his eyes toward the hunting-grounds of the Shoshone nation. It is well, for many scalps shall fall to warriors and braves. Let High Lance stand forth, and the Mystery Man will speak further."

In obedience, there rose from the circle of groveling redskins the semi-nude figure of the warrior named. It was not difficult for the scouts to recognize in the latter the warrior in command of the prong-horn hunters.

"High Lance is a mighty warrior; he has rubbed out the Apaches, and carries many scalps to the village of the Great Snake. Once, many moons ago, he was a prisoner in the camp of the Comanches. The Comanches would have slain him, but they held another prisoner, the Great Paleface Tracker of the Indians, whom they meant to slay first. Does High Lance remember?"

"Waugh! High Lance remembers his captivity," said the warrior, gruffly, as though he did not altogether relish the other's drift.

"High Lance never forgets," remarked the self-styled "Mystery Man," significantly. "He will remember how the Great Paleface Tracker escaped the Comanches, and how the Comanches mourned two full moons because their warriors had failed to spill his blood. If High Lance would stand first in the heart of his queen, Sour Tongue, he must bring the scalp of the Great Paleface Tracker to the lodge of the Great Snake."

"The Mystery Man speaks well, but let him say how High Lance is to go forth into the plains of the paleface and fetch the scalp of the great Buffalo Chief, Pah-e-haska. High Lance would need a powerful totem.

"No warrior nor medicine-man has yet been strong enough to take the scalp of the Great Paleface Tracker.

"High Lance cannot do so unless the Mystery Man will give him a fresh totem."

There was a subdued note of defiance about the manner of the warrior's utterance, from which Buffalo Bill made a few skillful deductions.

He perceived that there was no love lost between High Lance and the Mystery Man.

The latter's reply, however, gave both scouts something else to think about.

"The totem which High Lance seeks shall be his to-night," he said. "Let High Lance take the warpath, for this day the Mystery Man set eyes upon the Great Paleface Tracker. He has come with another paleface into the Shoshone hunting-grounds."

"Waugh! the Mystery Man's medicine is strong," said High Lance, half contemptuously.

"The Mystery Man has spoken. He goes now to talk with the Great Spirit; for the heart of High Lance doubts. Let the warriors and braves dip their arrows and lance-tips into the poison which the Mystery Man has made. Let them wait till he comes back with the totem which the Great Spirit has sent to High Lance."

The speaker, winding up with some unintelligible jargon, stepped lightly and rapidly from the circle of kneeling braves. He was coming in Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill's direction.

"Quick!" whispered the latter, "we must trap him at all hazards. It is his life or ours."

"Eh, pard, I guess it's time ter get in ther fust blow, an' ter knock ther tarnation Injun inter the middle o' next moon. I jedge we hed better let him nose past."

Without another word, Buffalo Bill unwound from about his middle several coils of seasoned hide.

CHAPTER III.

TRACKING THE TRAILER.

With light, brisk and noiseless tread, the redskin moved toward the spot occupied by Buffalo Bill and his companion.

The scouts kept well in the deep shadow of a great cypress; they scarcely breathed lest the sound should acquaint their alert foes with the secret of their presence.

The moments seemed like hours, the suspense being all the greater on account of the profound stillness brooding over the timber.

It was hard to believe that over fifty Indians were within beck and call, and that another was rapidly nearing their place of concealment.

In a few moments the Mystery Man passed unsuspectingly by.

He appeared to be making for the further end of the timber line, and the two scouts were not slow to follow in his tracks.

Tiptoeing noiselessly from tree to tree, with eyes fixed on the dimly-outlined figure moving on ahead, they followed their quarry into the furthest limit of the timber, from which neither the gathering of redskins within nor their camp without was visible.

Up to this point they had, despite the darkness, contrived to keep their foe in sight, but all at once they became conscious of failure.

The redskin had eluded them!

Of this there could be no doubt, for, moving forward, they stepped out upon the rolling plain, where the pale stars overhead presented a striking contrast to the pitchy darkness of the forest.

Wild Bill uttered an exclamation of annoyance, which, however, was immediately checked by his friend.

"Have a care, Bill," whispered Cody. "I believe the red devil has sighted us, and is somewhere behind."

"Curse him! he must have the eyes of a 'possum."

Wild Bill had scarcely relieved his feelings, when Buffalo Bill gave him a drive which sent him clean off his feet.

At the same moment there was a flash and the loud report of a rifle. Simultaneously, Cody struck out with the lasso he had made, and next moment the noose flew whistling over the head of the man who had fired. In a moment Wild Bill had regained his feet, and darted to his friend's assistance.

"Quick! quick! bring him down!" urged Cody, straining at the tightened rope.

"If that shot should alarm the Shoshones, they'll swarm like bees in a few minutes."

Wild Bill, however, needed no urging.

He caught a glimpse of the herculean savage, who was striving in vain to remove the tightened noose from his neck.

The Mystery Man had dropped his rifle.

In a flash Wild Bill whipped out his hunting-knife, and at one bound was upon the struggling redskin.

The knife clove the air with a hiss, and true to the scout's aim, struck the savage to the heart.

Springing back in time to avoid the redskin's heavy lurch forward, he ran back to the timber and listened, while Buffalo Bill, still keeping the lasso tight, knelt beside the stricken Indian.

The latter's frantic struggles were soon over; finally, a convulsive shudder shook his gigantic frame, and then, certain that the end had come, Cody let the toughened hide run loose.

He passed his hand rapidly over the redskin till he came to the bearskin belt, and his fingers touched the butt end of a Colt's six-shooter. The redskin's possession of such a weapon was only too horribly plain.

It must have belonged to one of the ill-fated pioneers. Apparently, the very worst had happened to the party of gold-seekers, and these mysterious dwellers in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, had secured the white man's trophies.

The discovery was calculated to stifle any sentiment of

pity which the scout might otherwise have entertained for the dead savage.

Quickly and deftly he removed the revolver and passed his hand into a kind of pouch in the Mystery Man's belt.

At the bottom he came upon something hard, about the size of a filbert, but seemingly all angles. He drew it forth, and could scarcely restrain a cry of wonder at what he beheld.

The little object emitted a pale blue, phosphorescent light, sufficiently strong to enable him to distinguish some of the lines in his own palm. To all intents the object was a solid crystal, beautifully polished.

Doubtless it was the Mystery Man's one peculiar totem, and regarding it as such, Cody slipped it into his own pocket.

Little could he foresee the tragic sequence of events which were destined to attend its reproduction. Had he done so, he would have prized it above every other possession.

It did not take him long to remove the lasso and secure the mysterious Indian's rifle, but, quick as he was, Wild Bill returned ere he had quite finished.

"Buffer," he whispered, hoarsely, "ther varmints have took ther trail. I gives 'em ten minutes ter nose out this yere dead meat, an' then there'll be a big show o' war-paint. We ain't got much time ter hide our tracks."

CHAPTER IV.

RUNNING THE RIVER GANTLET.

For two days and nights the two friends pressed feverishly ahead by the water highway, conscious that the success of their mission—nay, their very lives—depended upon the amount of progress they made at this stage.

They had, upon the memorable occasion of their first encounter with the Shoshone Indians, eluded the vigilance of High Lance and his warriors by making a considerable detour, and striking the stream many miles below the point where their canoe lay hidden.

By this means they hoped to give the Indians the impression that they were endeavoring to make their way out of the Sierras instead of penetrating deeper into their mysterious recesses.

Whether they had succeeded in tricking the astute red men they had no means of ascertaining, for the two succeeding days and nights passed without incident. Though they kept a watchful eye for Indian signs, they failed altogether to note any. Moreover, judging by the abundance of big game—bears, panther, and deer—in the gloomy, yet luxuriant wilderness that opened out successively before them, the presence of any considerable body of Indians seemed the one thing most unlikely.

The little stream which they had traversed so long was succeeded by a rapid and ever-widening river, seeming to flow through the very heart of the great mountain chain.

The sun was nearing the zenith on the third day, when, in the distance ahead, they caught sight of the three snow-capped mountain peaks.

This was the landmark they had sought so long and so diligently, for somewhere in the neighborhood of those snow peaks the Wall of Gold Mine hid its shimmering treasure.

So much they had gleaned at the settlement of Long Pine.

A little further on they made yet another discovery. The river branched, the main portion swirling around in a stiff current to the right, taking a direct easterly course, doubtless finding its level somewhere in the backwoods of Nevada.

Here, also, looking down from their point of vantage, they could distinguish a vast opening in the mountains. The probabilities were that from this direction the pioneers had struck the heart of the Sierras.

"There lies our way of retreat," said Buffalo Bill, pointing to the swift current, where it plunged between the walls of a gigantic canyon. "The stream ahead looks like a tributary, and possibly, if we follow it, we shall come across some sign of the luckless pioneers. Yonder must lie the Gateway of the Mountains, which the Piuva Indians hold to be fatal to every white man who attempts to enter it.

"I should imagine that our people met their fate somewhere between the opening of this tributary and the Gateway. The mountain sides are densely timbered, while the undulating ground near the stream is adapted for every kind of Indian ambush."

"We ain't going up-stream some longer with this load aboard—not ef we means ter run ag'inst time in this yere trail," Wild Bill commented.

With the practiced eye of an old trapper, he had discovered, about a couple of miles off, higher up the tributary, a difficult cascade, which meant, if they kept to the water, that they would have to carry their load up the steep bank, a tedious and difficult process.

Cody was not slow to follow his old friend's reasoning. Presently a solution of the difficulty occurred to him.

"There's a break in the bank a little way to the right. Suppose we cache some of the things there? They'll come in handy, too, if we should lose everything and have to beat a hasty retreat," he suggested.

"Them woods, Buffler, yer hes took clean out of my mouth," said Wild Bill, steering the canoe carefully toward the spot.

The current ran so strong, however, that they soon found it required their united efforts to make any perceptible headway. At last, having breasted the main river, they entered the smaller tributary and gained the bank at the spot indicated.

Upon one side of the spot rose a wall of rock perpendicularly for over a hundred feet, surmounted by clusters of mesquites, but sloping gradually backward to meet the lower ground some quarter of a mile inland; upon the other side, some two or three hundred yards from the perpendicular wall, the ground was broken up, consisting of innumerable bluffs, some timbered, some covered with wild vines and creepers, and some quite bare, the space between consisting of a fertile, rolling grass valley, rising gradually to meet the higher ground beyond.

By the water's edge grew a thicket of red willows and acacias in full bloom.

The scene was bewildering in its fairy-like beauty, but this the two scouts hardly noticed, their gaze being riveted upon a dark, ugly patch in the very middle of the clearing, and not far from the water's edge.

Neither spoke, as, bringing the canoe to land, they

moved forward, intent on examining the fire-blackened patch of ground. Indeed, they were only too conscious that their worst fears were likely to be confirmed.

A few recent bear tracks was all the grass disclosed, till they came to the barren patch, where a quantity of twisted, rusty iron, a few charred embers, and the partly-consumed stocks of four guns told their own grim tale of surprise and defeat.

A little further on, hard by one of the steepest bluffs, lay a huddled heap of bleached bones.

In silence the two scouts climbed to the top of the bluff.

Signs were not lacking to show that here the fight had waged hottest.

Broken arrow-heads and several shattered lances lay scattered amid the short, thick scrub which grew up in patches at the side of the bluff.

The top was gained at last. It formed a commanding position, but it had evidently been carried by assault. One thing was plain—the pioneers, notwithstanding the presence of the military escort, had perished in their bold attempt to reach the Eldorado of the mountains.

Seemingly, they had not even succeeded in reaching the ill-omened Gateway of the Mountains.

Wild Bill was first to break the silence that held the two friends spellbound.

"See here, pard, them fool pilgrims have left a message behind. It war a thousand chances ter one them reds didn't light on it. Anyways, here it ar'," and so saying, he drew from the soft ground the broken blade of a bowie.

Scratched on its surface was the following message:

"We are lost. The reds—Great Snake—Punnak village. Whoever reads this, send help! send help!"

"If it costs us our lives, we'll strike that village," said Buffalo Bill, grimly.

Depressed by their discovery, they made their way back to the tributary and lightened the canoe of every article that could be dispensed with.

These they proceeded to hide in a small cave at the foot of one of the bluffs.

Then, after a hurried meal, they pushed off up the tributary.

Just by the cascade they landed on the further bank, and carried their little craft up the steep side.

Night was closing down when they launched forth once more.

By moonrise they must have covered between eight and ten miles, for, as they proceeded, the stream widened considerably, while the current slowed.

They were proceeding leisurely along, when the faintest of faint ripples behind caused them to gaze sharply around.

They were electrified to behold two large war-canoes, crowded with warriors, bearing rapidly down upon them.

"We are in for a warm time, Bill. Depend on it, those red devils belong to High Lance's band; probably others are swarming the banks; keep to the middle of the stream, and paddle for all you're worth!"

The redskins raised a shout of defiance when they found their presence had been noted. For a while the two scouts kept a good lead, but at last, numbers told against them. The pursuers were surely getting nearer.

"Them varmints air calculating on running us down

jest past ther bend, pard," said Wild Bill, plying his paddle with fresh vigor, and sending the frail birch-bark canoe far out into midstream.

Buffalo Bill did not speak; kneeling behind his companion, he dropped his paddle and picked up his Winchester repeater.

The Shoshone warriors meant to bring matters to a climax.

The two canoes, filled with over a score of warriors in full chase behind, were well within rifle range, but he did not fire, for every shot was precious.

Nearer and yet nearer drew the pursuing red men. The bucks were paddling like demons, ever and anon giving loud yells of anticipated triumph.

Full well they knew that hard by the bend in the stream another and larger canoe, manned by a dozen war-bedecked Shoshone braves, each with his war-lance upraised to strike, was waiting to flash out across the bright, moonlit water.

Buffalo Bill, with his glance directed toward the pursuers behind, did not observe the danger lurking ahead until an exclamation of surprise and dismay burst from his comrade.

"Trapped like varmints, Buffler, durn mel!" he gasped, wrathfully.

And, indeed, as the canoe shot out from the shelter of the dark foliage, lining the left-hand bank of the stream, the possibility of escape for the two scouts seemed remote indeed.

The leading redskin uttered a fierce yell, and all the others, dropping their paddles and springing upright, poised their glittering lances, ready to launch at the daring paleface scouts.

But the latter had braved many a similar danger, and, following the momentary confusion, came a grim determination to baffle their savage enemies yet.

Without losing scarcely a foot of headway, the two friends pulled their paddles hard over, swinging about some eight or ten points, and then rushed off at a wide angle for the opposite bank.

The redskins instantly divined their scheme, and set about to defeat it.

Half their number, dropping their weapons, seized the paddles and sent the canoe leaping through the water. At the same moment a couple of lances came flashing across the moonlit space.

Wild Bill turned the canoe sharply to avoid the deadly missiles, while Cody, sighting the foremost Indian, let drive with his repeater.

His shot was greeted by a yell of defiance, but the grotesquely-painted redskin standing in the very prow of the swiftly-approaching canoe threw his arms wildly in the air, and uttering a yell, fell headlong into the water.

A moment later the Shoshone canoe struck the frail craft containing the scouts.

They were flung out backward as half a dozen spears were hurled at them, to the accompaniment of a deafening yell of triumph.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER BENEATH THE RIVER.

With that fierce yell still ringing in their ears, Buffalo Bill and his companion went under, being powerless to save themselves; yet, despite the gravity of the situation, they clung to their weapons, since these were their last hope in the coming hand-to-hand encounter.

The vengeful braves, however, had no intention of allowing the bold explorers to escape.

Not content with the havoc they had already wrought, quite half the number of braves dived headlong to the bottom of the stream.

Their lances had been cast aside, and with their long scalping-knives they sought the scouts.

Buffalo Bill, as he arose toward the surface, felt his throat suddenly gripped by one of the fierce braves.

Bringing his rifle up with a jerk, he struck his assailant full in the chest with such force that the recoil sent him downward, when the half-dazed redskin relaxed his hold. By a tremendous effort he retained his breath, and struck rapidly out with his free hand, going with the current, and, as well as he could judge, moving toward the left-hand bank, where the shadow cast by the timber would be deepest.

He had not miscalculated, as was made patent when he finally arose, gasping, to the surface.

Swinging rapidly around, he perceived several struggling figures around the large canoe, about twenty yards distant.

He fancied he could make out Wild Bill among them, and was about to strike out to his friend's assistance, when the dangers attending his own position were recalled sharply to mind.

An arrow flew hissing into the water, but a few inches from his head.

Another and another followed, and one pierced the collar of his jacket.

He had been noticed by the occupants of the two canoes in the rear.

Indeed, the leading craft was almost upon him, when he realized the full gravity of the situation.

With a rapid downward move, he ducked as the canoe shot over the spot which, less than a moment before, he had occupied.

He rose again, somewhat nearer midstream, and a few yards behind the last canoe.

His reappearance was greeted by a fresh storm of arrows.

To his fierce assailants it must have seemed that he bore a charmed life, since none of the deadly missiles touched him.

Then, to the accompaniment of a veritable pandemonium of war-whoops, the braves in the last canoe leaped into the stream with the object of swarming around him.

They were speedily reinforced by their comrades in the first craft.

Buffalo Bill waited till the first Indian got within striking distance, then, as the latter made a furious cut at him with a tomahawk, he took a swift side-stroke and shot by the luckless brave.

Next instant he seized the latter around the middle, and with the purchase thus obtained, was able to wield his clubbed rifle to some effect.

A crashing blow stunned his assailant, who sank like a stone.

This Cody had foreseen. Clinging to the stunned redskin, he was dragged down some distance, and by this simple method he succeeded in eluding the rest of the braves who were thirsting for his blood.

Their fierce cries still rang in his ears as the current swirled him around and around, bearing him sometimes against the leaden body of his inanimate foe.

Struggling hard against the well-nigh overpowering desire to rise and breathe, he was borne onward for what—to him—seemed an interminable distance, but what in reality was little more than a score of yards.

But there is a limit to the strongest powers of endurance, and that limit Cody had now reached.

It was impossible to remain under another second, so, releasing his grip on the stunned redskin, he shot up to the surface. To his amazement, no redskin was in sight.

Not trusting to the evidence of his eyes, he took a few quick gasps for breath, and again plunged beneath the surface.

This time he was conscious of a greater difficulty in remaining below. There seemed no current to help him along, and he was constrained at last to make the surface.

Though the yells of his would-be captors fell upon his ears, not one of the redskins was visible.

Instantly Cody grasped the truth.

He had been partly carried by the current, partly by his own exertions, beneath one of the floating islands of water plants of various kinds, which are frequently encountered on the rivers draining the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The possibility of such shelter had not occurred to him before; it came to him now with something like a tinge of bitterness.

His own fate and Wild Bill's might have been vastly different had they steered their little craft toward what at the time they had supposed to be the right-hand bank. The moonlight revealed it now—a long, bush-covered, floating strip.

He struck out for it with what strength remained in his stiffened and exhausted limbs. Its edge, composed of a mingling of timber, clay and sand, supported by a thick mat of floating bark, enabled him to clamber speedily up. The surface was covered thickly with huge bunches of Spanish moss, enabling him to move noiselessly to the further edge.

Here, from behind a graceful acacia bush, he caught a glimpse of his late foes.

Many of the braves were still swimming to and fro in a fruitless attempt to make out his whereabouts.

The majority, however, had climbed back into their canoe, which had been joined by the remaining craft.

Suddenly Cody's lips tightened, and his heart gave a leap, for, as the canoe which had been first to attack them glided past, he beheld the body of his companion dragging in the water, being attached to the stern of the canoe by a looped green-hide line, passed beneath his arms, and affixed in such a manner as to render the prisoner quite helpless. Standing over the helpless scout was High Lance, the Shoshone warrior.

The redskin presented an inviting target, and almost mechanically Buffalo Bill raised his rifle.

Next instant, however, he lowered it with a sigh, only too conscious of the instant fate which must befall Wild Bill if he fired.

It was patent that he would have to wait another opportunity to avenge his friend's captivity.

To attempt a rescue under the circumstances was alike impossible, since the recent struggle, coming after a day of arduous toil, had completely exhausted him.

Yet, with that wonderful tenacity of purpose, which has been the secret of the gallant scout's amazing success, he instantly formed a plan for saving Wild Bill from the horrible tortures which were doubtless in store for him.

Briefly, it consisted in following the canoe to which his friend was secured in such a cruel manner.

By this means, if the luck favored him, he might find an opportunity to rescue Wild Bill before High Lance could bring him to the Punnak village.

The plan, in the first place, meant reverting to the water and following the canoe down stream as far as was possible under cover.

Wasting no time over preliminaries, Cody slung the rifle over his shoulder, and treading softly back to the inner side of the floating snag, he lowered himself down and struck out, hugging the bank as closely as possible.

The precaution was a wise one, for, presently, overcome by fatigue, he was seized by a horrible numbness, and had just time to crawl up the bank when consciousness forsook him.

He lay for hours in a heavy stupor, and when at last he awoke, it was to find himself still surrounded by darkness, but wonderfully refreshed in body and mind.

This circumstance, coupled with the pitchy darkness—for the moon had set—puzzled him not a little.

Could it be possible that he had slept through a succeeding day and night?

It was hardly likely he could have recovered his present degree of strength in a few short hours.

Indeed, the probabilities all pointed to his first conjecture being the correct one.

He sprang to his feet, alarmed and dismayed; his limbs were uncommonly stiff, causing his movements at first to be awkward and slow.

By degrees, however, his wonted agility returned, and, feeling his way cautiously, he proceeded toward the outer edge of the great "snag."

As well as he could recollect, it was little more than a score of feet across.

And, having covered this distance, he felt about for the edge, but in vain. It was not to be found.

Something like a thrill of fear assailed him.

What had happened?

Whither had the snag drifted?

A thousand wild conjectures filled his mind and held him transfixed to the spot.

He could, however, do nothing till daybreak, and had, perforce, to make the best of a baffling situation.

Yet, with mind and body alert, the delay seemed interminable.

Gradually the distant mountain crests to the east showed dimly against a leaden sky.

A little later they were aglow with the beams of the rising sun.

The crisp morning air rendered Buffalo Bill susceptible to the wants of the inner man.

The pangs of thirst were easily and quickly satisfied. To lessen in some degree the gnawings of hunger, he tightened his belt, and set about resolutely to discover his whereabouts.

He found, as he had already begun to suspect, that the snag had become lodged against a jutting portion of the bank, but how far it had drifted he was quite unable to decide.

Neither Indians nor canoes were in sight, while there was no particular landmark to arrest his attention.

Stepping from the snag to the solid bank, he proceeded cautiously to climb the higher ground in the hope of being able to make a survey from the top of a great bare bluff, which, rising abruptly some fifty feet above a sea of dark fronds, commanded nearly the whole of the timbered valley.

He gained this point of vantage an hour after sunrise, when the valley was bathed in a glorious sheen of light, and the towering, snow-capped peaks of the Sierras were aglow with all the colors of the rainbow.

With something akin to magic, the forest seemed to attune itself to the dawn of another day; its somber depths, pierced by the rays of the morning sun, became alive with the humming of insects, the song of birds, and the several cries of big and small game.

Yet Buffalo Bill heeded none of this.

With anxious gaze he scanned the valley up and down, noting in the distance, to the north, the dark, forbidding Gateway of the Mountains.

A seemingly impenetrable forest hid most of the valley, up to the opposite side of the stream, but looking southwest, he descried beyond the timber belting the tributary, an open space several miles in extent, stretching from the valley to the crest of the mighty canyon which formed the Gateway of the Mountains.

Seemingly on the verge of this clearing had been pitched an Indian camp.

That the red men were astir the wreaths of smoke curling up from their several fires showed.

Their numbers could not be very considerable, and it flashed upon the watchful scout that they were probably a portion of High Lance's band, bound for the village with their captive.

Probably they had disembarked close by the cascade, lower down the tributary.

If so, Cody felt confident that by striking across the stream and penetrating the timber, he could come up with their present encampment before nightfall.

Deciding to act at once, he descended the bluff and described a bee line for the water.

Wild peaches, plums and damsons grew in luxuriant profusion, and some of these, tempered with the edible pods of the mesquite, formed a very welcome, if somewhat unsubstantial meal.

He passed several bear tracks and sighted one or two wild turkeys and some prairie hens, but he was loath to expend a shot unnecessarily, since his ammunition was sadly diminished, and must needs be held in reserve for grimmer ends.

Crossing the stream, he selected a convenient spot on

the edge of the forest and proceeded to thoroughly overhaul and clean his weapons.

The process was a tedious one, but he felt well repaid when, by the end of a couple of hours, his rifle and revolvers were in fit working trim.

He smiled grimly when, having replaced the revolvers in his belt and the rifle over his shoulder, he set forth, prepared to surprise Wild Bill's fierce captors.

CHAPTER VI.

A DESPERATE CHASE AND A DESPERATE CHANCE.

By midday Buffalo Bill had reached the further edge of the forest, while stretching away for miles lay the clearing, a jumble of rocks, sand and water, relieved by patches of chaparral, as well as by small, confined grass prairies.

Timber was not plentiful, though here and there a fringe of cottonwoods or a coppice of live oaks marked the locality of either a miniature lake or stream.

Directly west, upon the very limit of the horizon, towered the backbone of the Sierras, clad with dark pines almost to the region of eternal snow.

Cody was not a little surprised to find that the redskins he had observed at daybreak had not moved forward.

Their camp, being pitched rather less than two miles from the edge of the forest, upon a slight rise, made any movement upon his own part impossible till nightfall.

Casting about for a suitable place of concealment, he lighted upon a little sun-dried gully, where he could observe the movements of High Lance's braves without drawing upon himself their unwelcome attention.

The place was admirably suited for his purpose, being sheltered from the direct rays of the sun by a mushroom-like boulder supporting a straggling growth of chaparral, its under part being scarred and pierced by many a fissure, affording him both the means of shelter and observation.

For some time he watched the distant camp, striving to discover the whereabouts of his companion, but the heat of noontide made him drowsy, and presently he began to nod.

Curled up beneath the shelter of the boulder, and hidden from any passing redskin by the overspreading chaparral, he regarded the risk of discovery as remote, indeed. With his rifle ready to hand, he decided to embrace the opportunity, and so gradually he fell fast asleep.

The afternoon was wearing to a close, when he awoke with a start, roused by a distinct movement hard by.

Mechanically he seized the rifle, taking at the same moment a brief, sweeping glance around; but his foe was no human one.

With a thrill of horror he perceived a rattler not a dozen paces off, preparing to strike.

The reptile belonged to a particularly horrible and deadly species, being the huge double-fanged rattlesnake, whose bite means certain death—a great, yellowish-brown monster, whose body was as thick as a man's arm, its coils quivering slightly as its flat, venomous-looking head moved stealthily to and fro, and its forked tongue darted out with fearful precision.

Its small, beady eyes shone with a baleful light.

For a moment the discovery paralyzed Buffalo Bill;

roused from a sound sleep, to be confronted by a danger such as this, was sufficient to unnerve the hardiest. Moreover, he was taken at a fearful disadvantage, since the reptile, being well within striking distance, had ranged itself in a line with his weapon.

One swift stroke, and those cruel, darting fangs must pierce his face.

The very slightest movement would precipitate the reptile's attack.

To shoot was his only chance.

It was an awful position, for at any moment the huge rattler might strike.

Its rattles were working with angry vehemence, while its tongue seemed attuned to those awful sounds, darting in and out at lightning speed.

Buffalo Bill watched it stretch its coils preparatory to making the fatal stroke.

The monster's horrible little eyes met his own with a gleam of hideous comprehension.

There was something uncanny in that baleful look.

At last, impatient with himself, and determined to put an end to the fearful suspense, Buffalo Bill jerked the rifle up an inch or two. The challenge was instantly accepted by the rattlesnake, which, with lightning speed, moved into line with the weapon.

This circumstance was not lost upon its would-be victim, for, in a flash, there occurred to him a means of escape.

He recalled how the Comanche Indians had a peculiar manner of killing this particular species of rattlesnake, which, they averred, was wont always to keep its head and body in line with any gun or weapon aimed at it.

Of one thing he was certain—the Comanches were regarded by all the neighboring tribes as experts in the art of killing the double-fanged rattler.

He decided to try the Comanche method.

Again he moved the rifle slightly, elevating the muzzle to a convenient point.

The great, yellowish-brown monster glided almost imperceptibly into line, and seemed to look straight down the barrel.

Satisfied with the experiment, Buffalo Bill rapidly sighted his horrible foe, and as the rattlesnake swung forward, he fired.

The shot was an awkward one, owing to his confined position, and the recoil sent him hard against the side of the boulder.

Nevertheless, it proved fatal to the reptile. The monster's ugly head was blown clean off, yet the muscular contractions of its huge body gave it a horrible semblance of life, as, thrashing the ground, its coils rose and fell in ghastly agitation.

Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet, uncertain whether the reptile was killed outright or merely disabled, but a rapid scrutiny relieved him of any further dread on that score.

He was roused quickly, however, to a sense of further danger by an arrow striking the top of the boulder upon a level with his shoulder.

Dropping instinctively behind cover, he peered through one of the crevices near the base of the rock, and perceived a party of some ten or twelve Shoshone braves rapidly approaching, dodging from cover to cover as they drew near.

They were spreading out toward the edge of the forest, evidently anticipating his flight in that direction, and with the object of rendering escape thither impossible.

The shot he had been compelled to fire in self-defense had doubtless acquainted them with his presence.

All this he divined in a moment, as, with caution born of long practice, he slipped another cartridge into the empty chamber of his Winchester repeater.

He had no choice but to retreat, and make for the cover of the timber.

Delay meant certain capture.

In an instant he was up, and, bending double, started at a run for the forest.

His enemies raised a hoarse yell of defiance, while, an instant later, half a dozen arrows whistled by.

One of the deadly missiles actually cut lengthwise across his belt, but, striking the butt of one of his revolvers, its poisoned tip was turned aside.

He had no time to dwell, however, upon the almost miraculous escape, for the two leading braves, with that fleetness of foot characteristic of their tribe, were almost upon him.

The distance he had yet to cover to gain the timber was greater than the distance separating him from the two foremost redskins.

The situation was desperate. It would be impossible to reach the shelter of the forest in time.

Wheeling suddenly about, he let drive at one of his assailants. As the smoke from the rifle cleared away, he saw that the brave had fallen; but at the same moment the other sprang at him with spear upraised. With a yell of triumph, the redskin struck his spear forward, its keen point catching the scout's jacket just below the armpit. Simultaneously, Buffalo Bill discharged his second shot and leaped aside as the redskin sprang high in the air, giving utterance to a fearful death-scream.

Tearing the spear from his side and reloading at lightning speed, Buffalo Bill aimed at one of his would-be captors who was close upon the edge of the forest. His shot told true, and the Shoshone brave toppled over with a bullet through his spine.

A swift glance around showed that his remaining assailants were taking aim at him with their arrows.

A moment later the feathered messengers of death were speeding over the intervening space. Cody dropped promptly, with the result that the arrows flew over him; then, springing up, he again essayed to reach the cover of the timber.

By this time the other braves were issuing from the camp, and judging by the fierce yells echoing and re-echoing around, the number of his assailants was considerable.

He never faltered, but kept steadily on, and at last, with a sigh of intense relief, he darted in between the dark pines.

Being unable to cover his tracks, his one chance depended on his ability to get well ahead of those braves who were trying to intercept him at a point some two hundred yards to the left.

To do this, he must needs run at an angle to their point of approach.

Anxious and breathless, straining every nerve and muscle, he raced along with fully a score of braves in hot

pursuit behind. They were steadily gaining, since they carried no weight whatever. If only he could keep them at bay till night set in, his prospect of escape would immeasurably improve.

With this object uppermost in his mind, he plunged into a clump of underbrush, and, kneeling down, prepared to deal with his assailants separately as they came up.

The redskins, however, instantly divined his object, and accommodated themselves with amazing promptitude to his change of tactics; for the moment he disappeared in the underbrush; they, too, took to cover.

In vain he strove to sight the nearest. The timber might have been empty of copper-skinned foes, so far as any display on their part was concerned; yet he was conscious that some of them were stealthily working around to his rear.

He strained his ears to catch the very faintest sound in vain.

In truth, Buffalo Bill's fierce foes were in their element. Practiced in every art of woodcraft, accustomed to stalk the foe into the very depths of the forest, each brave enjoyed the fierce anticipation of triumph.

The great Paleface Tracker was at their mercy—they had trapped him at last.

Buffalo Bill was quick to comprehend his mistake, yet equally quick to rectify it; and it was just this marvelous adaptability to circumstances that was destined to confound the Shoshones.

Finding that his place of concealment would speedily be converted into a trap, he proceeded without a moment's delay to get out of it.

To advance or retreat would, however, merely draw upon him the attention of his enemies. He adopted another plan, and one such as the cunning redskins did not anticipate.

The undergrowth embraced the trunks of several scarred pines, varying considerably in size, but all growing closely together, and well screened by their mass of dark foliage.

With the utmost caution and absolute stealth, he proceeded to climb one of the smallest, and, working his way along its stoutest limb, he, by this means, gained the giant of the group.

By working his way along one of its tapering branches he was able to swing himself on to another tree beyond the clump of underbrush.

Thus, by using the interlocking branches, Buffalo Bill stealthily worked away from his place of concealment.

The labor involved, however, was immense, and, having covered a space of something like one hundred paces, he lowered himself to the ground.

Hard by his place of descent lurked a Shoshone brave, lying flat upon the ground, with his gaze fixed intently upon the clump of underbrush; his trail, where he had wormed himself over the carpet of pine-needles, being distinctly visible.

It was characteristic of Buffalo Bill's stealthy movements that the redskin had neither heard nor observed him.

Tiptoeing noiselessly from tree to tree, the daring scout at length regained the edge of the timber.

In the distance, by the camp, a few braves were moving to and fro, while others were busy striking the wigwams

and making preparations for a speedy move, doubtless anticipating the early presence of another prisoner.

By crawling into a small gully, Buffalo Bill was able to make good headway without attracting their attention.

All at once a burst of savage war-whoops behind warned him that his flight had become known.

Less than a quarter of a mile ahead there was a break in the ground, and beyond he distinguished the gleam of water fringed with willows and cottonwoods.

Since his actual whereabouts had not yet been discovered, he resolved to make with all haste for the water.

The pursuing red men would have little difficulty in picking up his trail and running him down to the water's edge, but as he moved on, the possibility of successfully eluding them presented itself, the surface of the water being covered with patches of rotting driftwood.

Crashing through the thicket of red willows, he lowered himself into the water, and made for the nearest drift heap.

The savage yells of the approaching Indians spurred him on, and in feverish haste he gained the pile of derelict timber.

Simultaneously he took a plunge beneath the surface, and two or three seconds later rose with a nasty thud against the bottom of the drift pile.

Turning on his back, he pushed his rifle into the yielding mass, and winding both arms about one of the heaviest logs, contrived to support himself in such a manner that his head, though buried amid the loose pile, was above the water surface, while his body was admirably screened from even the closest scrutiny of his savage foes.

Their war-whoops grew louder and louder, being presently followed by the splashing of several bodies in the water.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE GRIP OF THE WATER MONSTER.

In a state of fearful suspense, Buffalo Bill remained perfectly motionless while his enemies swarmed around.

They were being urged on by High Lance, who was personally conducting the search, and whose rapid orders were issued in a tone of fierce impatience.

The Shoshone chief shrewdly suspected his enemy was lurking somewhere under cover of the driftwood; so with grim determination he set about examining each pile of rotting timber.

The one concealing Buffalo Bill, being the closest to hand, was the first to receive the fierce chieftain's attention.

Clambering on to the tangle of wood, High Lance rapidly and narrowly examined its surface, thrusting his spear into every cranny where he thought there was a possibility of the fugitive lurking.

Upon one of these occasions the spearhead actually pierced the log to which Buffalo Bill was clinging.

In a moment it flashed upon him that he had been discovered, and with his right hand he reached down to his belt for one of the revolvers. For an instant his enemy's life trembled in the balance, for of a surety had

High Lance struck further, a bullet would have sped upward, and brought him crashing down.

But the spear was withdrawn, and, with an angry grunt, the Shoshone chief plunged into the water to assist further in the seemingly fruitless search.

Buffalo Bill breathed freely again, since the risk of discovery was momentarily decreasing with the near approach of night, for, with the setting of the sun, darkness closed in quickly, there being little twilight and no moon till nearly midnight.

With eager vigilance he watched the little gleams of daylight through the tangle of wood overhead grow dimmer and dimmer, till at length they faded out, leaving all dark, and grim, and cold.

Now and again a distant splash warned him that his foes had not all departed.

Possibly some of them had been stationed among the willows with the object of renewing the search with the coming of day, in which case it behooved him to make good his escape before moonrise.

Yet to venture forth so close to the willows would be to invite instant discovery.

It was patent to the daring scout that some other plan must needs be devised. For some time he cast about in his mind for a possible solution of the difficulty, till at last a plan, as daring as it was novel, occurred to him.

It was nothing less than propelling with his own strength the timber-drift to the further bank.

As well as he could judge from the brief glimpse he had obtained of the extent of the water, the further bank was neither distant nor difficult to negotiate. No sooner did the plan occur to him, than he put it to a practical test.

Fortunately, a perceptible current moved in the direction he wished to take.

The driftwood had evidently come down from some stream or lake higher up.

By turning off his back and planting his head against the lower portion of the log which had so long supported him, he was able to strike out with both arms.

Nevertheless, it took both time and patience to get the tangle of driftwood into motion, but after several minutes of exhausting effort, he could tell by the wash of water against the under part of the logs that the attempt had not been made in vain.

With little more effort on his part the driftwood glided on, impelled by its own momentum.

Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill continued to ply his strokes with undiminished vigor.

Elated at the prospect of escape, and the possibility of yet saving Wild Bull from his remorseless captors, he exerted himself to the utmost.

For nearly half an hour he worked thus, ever and anon sounding the depth with his legs in the hope of finding he was close by the bank.

He had just repeated this operation, when the timber gave an ugly lurch downward.

Simultaneously Buffalo Bill found himself forced beneath the surface.

With a quick back-stroke he endeavored to recover the gap where breathing was possible, but his body striking the pile beneath the surface, he was forced by the shock further down.

Instantly he seized the advantage of freeing himself entirely from the timber by giving a quick twist to his body as he struck outward and upward.

It seemed to him as he passed to the surface as though a number of arms were stretched forth to drag him down.

A moment later a gasp of sweet, fresh air infused fresh life into him. He struck out; but, simultaneously he became aware of something detaining him behind.

Surprised and alarmed, he turned swiftly on to his side, dreading the exultant yell which would assuredly break from his enemies the very moment they discovered that their presence had become known.

No such sound, however, broke the deathly stillness; only the faint ripple of the water against the driftwood reached him.

Pitchy darkness enveloped him, not so much as a star gleamed from the heavens above. He was unable to distinguish the bank, yet the fact that one of his legs had become entangled in a mass of weeds argued that it must be close by.

Again he struck out, this time with considerable force, making a desperate effort to free his foot from the entangled growth; but, to his horror, he was seized around the waist by something which felt like cold steel rope, and, despite the most desperate struggles, he was dragged beneath the surface.

Down and yet down the horrible something forced him.

His very struggles seemed to increase the tenacity of that awful grip, for his arms were next seized in the same hideous vice.

Alone, gasping for breath, enveloped in darkness, he realized the awful truth—he was helpless in the loathsome grip of some water monster!

To struggle with a foe whose very form and nature are unknown, is a very different thing from facing a horde of yelling redskins; different, too, from staking one's chance against the most deadly of reptiles.

But when, in addition to such a struggle, the victim has no possible chance of getting to know what his grewsome assailant is like, something more than mere physical courage is required.

In this critical moment of his life's history, Buffalo Bill displayed the very highest form of bravery.

He retained his presence of mind, and with grim determination grappled with the unknown horror.

Since his struggles only increased the tenacity of that fearful grip, he relaxed them; then, with every nerve throbbing, the blood hammering at his temples under the awful strain of being so long confined beneath the surface, he remained, by a tremendous effort of his will, for several moments absolutely passive.

The steel-like ropes encasing his limbs became less agitated, but their tenacious grasp showed no sign of abating, since the slightest effort on his part was immediately attended by the addition of further streamers.

With despair in his heart, yet determined to struggle to the bitter end, Buffalo Bill adopted a change of tactics.

Very gently, almost imperceptibly, he moved his right hand to his belt. Then, swift as a lightning flash, he snatched away his bowie, as once more the horrible thing enveloping him tightened its meshes.

A desperate life-struggle ensued. Buffalo Bill, with long, sweeping strokes, cut through the meshes enveloping his right side, only to find the rest tighten convulsively and drag him further and yet further down.

At last his feet touched the bottom, and, making one supreme effort, he drew the ribbon-like attachments taut; then, with two quick, strong strokes of the knife, he severed most of them, and with all his strength pulled against the few streamers still enveloping him.

They parted, and, at a rush, his body shot to the surface.

Afterward he had a vague recollection of drinking in the sweet, cool air, and struggling fiercely up a reed-lined bank, then all was a merciful blank, till he found himself lying amid a tangle of crushed reeds under a silvery sheen of moonlight.

He tried to move, but he was too weak to crawl to the top of the bank; every limb and muscle throbbed with pain; even the upraising of an arm was attended by an agonizing twinge.

For several hours he remained in a state of painful helplessness, till slumber closed his weary lids.

The day was some hours old when he awoke finally, feeling stiff and bruised, but able to move with something like his wonted vigor.

His first act was to crawl to the top of the bank and take a searching look around. As far as the eye could carry he fancied he could observe moving specks, showing that his foes were still in the neighborhood, although not in the actual vicinity. Upon the far side of the water patch, something like half a mile away, ran the red willow thicket through which he had taken his first desperate plunge. Being on a somewhat higher eminence, he could make out the chain of small lakes, whose presence the current had led him to suspect.

They described an irregular course through the barren valley.

His next act was to recover his rifle. This was not difficult, since the driftwood had turned bottom upward, exposing the butt of the weapon and enabling Buffalo Bill to secure the same by reaching forward.

A horrible fascination impelled him to examine the spot where he had engaged in such a fearful struggle for life.

The surface was covered with a greenish slime that made him shudder; but this was not all, since the pile of driftwood, being caught in the meshes of the water horror, was slowly but surely being sucked below.

Buffalo Bill cut one of the long, ribbon-like attachments in half, and watched the severed portion fall away from the timbers, while from the raw edge there oozed a glutinous fluid of a greenish tinge.

It was a vegetable horror, after all, being, as he afterward ascertained, a river weed peculiar to the Sierras.

As well as he could make out, the weed grew in profusion along the bank, which further on was strewn with derelict timber, overgrown by a mass of greenish-brown climbers.

The redskins were doubtless aware of the horrible and peculiar properties of the weed, since they had avoided that portion of the bank, it being doubtless due to this circumstance that he had escaped their notice after day-break.

Having ensconced himself in a sheltered nook on the

bank, Buffalo Bill next proceeded to overhaul his weapons, and presently, by means of an old trapper's ruse, he snared a prairie rabbit, and set about preparing a well-earned meal.

It wanted a couple of hours till nightfall, when, having satisfied the cravings of the inner man, cleaned his weapons, and overhauled his sadly-depleted stock of ammunition, Buffalo Bill sallied forth, resolved to pick up the trail of High Lance.

He had proceeded perhaps a mile, and had no practical reason to fear a surprise since no redskin was in sight, when he was assailed by a strange premonition of danger.

Another man might have put it down to idle fancy, and thus have passed it by unheeded.

Not so Buffalo Bill; he was too old a hand to ignore anything in the shape of a warning, while this very feeling, unaccountable though it might be, had saved him from being surprised on more than one occasion.

He turned abruptly from the trail and made for a small rocky bluff to the left, surmounted by a great peaked bowlder.

Gaining the top, he took care to avoid the shadow side, and crawling forward in the full glare of the sun, he peered over the summit.

He had reason to felicitate himself upon the precaution he had adopted, for low down in a small defile, advancing directly upon him, were a small band of Shoshone warriors.

One circumstance struck him forcibly. They carried neither lances nor bows and arrows, being armed with rifles of the latest pattern.

Evidently they did not belong to the band he had so recently eluded, although judging by their stealthy movements, they were aware of his presence in their hunting-grounds, and were evidently bent on picking up his trail.

There being no time to lose, Buffalo Bill crept noiselessly and swiftly from his point of vantage, making in all haste for the only possible cover, a small circular mesquite bush.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAILSTORM'S TRIUMPH.

For two whole days Buffalo Bill was compelled to lurk in the midst of the mesquite bush.

His enemies had managed to pick up his trail and track him to the top of the very bluff whence he had first sighted them.

But by rare good luck, they failed to light upon his hiding-place.

Fortune for once had favored the brave scout, who found beneath the clump of mesquite a coyote's burrow which, by slightly enlarging, he converted into an effectual place of concealment.

The pods on the bush supplied him with food, and for drink he had perforce to suck the dew-laden foliage.

His watchful foes had pitched their camp perilously close to his hiding-place; a circumstance, however, that was not wholly detrimental, since, by overhearing all that passed, he gleaned some important news.

He discovered, among other things, that Great Snake was the head Mystery Man of the Punnak Indians, a tribe distantly related to the Shoshone family, its mem-

bers, however, instead of taking the warpath, were dedicated to the mystic rites of a mysterious temple situated somewhere in the fastness of the mountains.

They numbered less than three hundred souls, each being a Mystery Man, as the medicine-men are called among the Shoshones, in his own right.

They seemed to be held in considerable awe by the fighting warriors.

These latter, although united under one queen, who bore the ominous name of Sour Tongue, really embraced two rival bands, the larger being led by High Lance; the other consisting of a small, picked band of dog soldiers,* the especial followers of a chief called Hailstorm.

It needed no great amount of discernment on Buffalo Bill's part to discover that between the two chiefs, High Lance and Hailstorm, there existed a state of rivalry, each aspiring for the hand of the queen in marriage.

Since High Lance had scored heavily by the capture of Wild Bill, Hailstorm was especially anxious to take Buffalo Bill alive.

This was news, indeed, and the daring scout felt thankful for the chance that had put him in possession of it.

Moreover, he learned enough to convince him that the whole of the Wall of Gold Mine pioneers had perished in their foolhardy attempt to effect a settlement in the very heart of the fierce red man's hunting-grounds.

The most important item he gleaned related to Wild Bill, who, it seemed, was destined to be handed over to the tender mercies of the Great Snake by nightfall on the morrow.

It was toward evening on the second day that Buffalo Bill became acquainted with this piece of news, which made it plain to him that his old friend and companion was doomed, unless within four-and-twenty hours he could in some manner effect his rescue.

To Buffalo Bill, the one thing needful was to get out of his present trap. If he could do that, he might, with the information he had gleaned concerning High Lance's whereabouts and intentions, effect his friend's rescue.

The suspense was becoming unbearable, when, as night closed down, Buffalo Bill cautiously raised himself from his place of concealment and peered into the warriors' camp.

Fully fifty dog soldiers were gathered around the camp-fire, awaiting the evening meal.

Their leader and three of his chief warriors had not yet returned from a careful search through the distant forest, whither they had departed early in the afternoon.

The warriors were speculating on Wild Bill's probable fate, and the horrible tortures which Buffalo Bill heard enumerated made his blood run cold, and increased his anxiety to save his friend from the merciless clutches of the chief Mystery Man.

It occurred to him to venture forth at once, accepting the risk, since the night gave promise of favoring such an enterprise.

Beyond the glow of the fire all was inclosed in pitchy darkness; rain was beginning to fall, and a strong wind was getting up.

If once beyond earshot, he felt equal to eluding the whole of the now feasting band.

In order to test the vigilance of his foes, he moved the stock of his rifle through the cluster of mesquite, making as much sound as he judged would be attended by the passage of his body.

Two or three of those in the circle nearest to his place of concealment caught the sound and glanced sharply around, but putting it down to the increased violence of the wind, they soon relaxed their vigilance, and returned to the savory haunch of venison which the rest were dispatching with avidity.

Deeming the opportunity ripe, Buffalo Bill slowly emerged from his coiled-up position in the coyote's burrow, and stealthily wormed his way beneath the cluster of mesquite furthest from the camp-fire.

Then, having gained the open, he reached back for his rifle, and securing the needful weapon, he commenced a noiseless retreat.

Ever and anon he glanced back at the fire-lit faces of his deadly foes.

The slightest movement on their part brought him to a stop.

His own movements were conducted with absolute stealth, but they were necessarily slow, a circumstance fraught with grave danger, since now that he was clear of the mesquite, there was no possible means of cover till he gained the outer ring of darkness, while even there the piercing eyes of the redskins might pick him out.

Slowly he wormed his way over the fitfully-illuminated circle of ground, creeping gradually into the surrounding darkness.

Not till he was well beyond the fireglow did he breathe freely.

At this point he quickened his pace, making for the chain of lakes where he had previously eluded the vigilance of High Lance.

His object was to skirt the edge of the distant forest, and thus reach the Gateway of the Mountains, through which he must needs pass to gain the Punnak village.

During his two days' inactivity he had taken his bearings, and these served him in good stead now, enabling him to ford the water and strike the forest quite half a mile from its southern termination.

Cautiously as any Indian on the trail he crept forward, cautiously yet swiftly, creeping from tree to tree, peering forward whenever he came to an open glade, and with the sense of hearing alert, darting across at racing speed.

Sometimes he fancied he was being tracked stealthily down, and as he crouched in the brushwood, listening to the moaning of the wind overhead, and the shrill sweeping of the rain, the fancy grew like a horrible nightmare.

Presently, when again he pressed on, the storm became so furious that it threatened to impede his progress.

By this time the fancy that he was being tracked down had become a certainty, sounds which his experienced ear detected could proceed from no other cause than moccasined feet moving swiftly, over the rain-soddened ground.

His enemies apparently were numerous, and close at hand.

*This name is universally applied by the Red Indians to those warriors of the several tribes who adopt a stricter code of rules than the general body. The title is much coveted.—Ed.

All at once the trees thinned, and he darted forward into an open glade.

Ahead the swirl of a river sounded like music to his ears, since it offered the possibility of escape.

The rain was sweeping down in torrents when he gained the river, and securing his rifle to his back, plunged in.

There was little fear that his splash would be heard; the fury of the storm forbade it.

But danger of another kind, and such as he had not allowed for, confronted him.

The current was swirling like a mill-race, and in spite of every effort, bore him steadily back.

Incumbered with rifle and belongings, he was powerless to stem it.

To most men the difficulty would have spelt defeat; not so to Buffalo Bill, who, finding it impossible to struggle forward, made once more for the bank and essayed to pull himself out.

Next moment from the depths of the glade the light of a torch blazed forth.

He was discovered!

A group of Hailstorm's fierce dog soldiers were racing toward him.

The wind bore their fierce yell past, and simultaneously a warrior, whom he had not before observed, sprang out from the shelter of a great pine, and aimed a crushing blow at him with clubbed rifle.

Leaping aside, the hard-pressed scout drew his revolver, and fired point-blank at his assailant.

The Shoshone dropped at his very feet; but this momentary victory was dearly bought.

As Buffalo Bill simultaneously sprang back into the swirling stream, a dozen rifle-shots whistled past his head, and splashed into the water around.

He was struck by two—in arm and shoulder.

With dogged pluck he struck out for mid-stream as a second volley was discharged at him.

Choking and struggling he was borne along by the swift current, as other torchlights flashed and gleamed along the timber-covered bank.

The forest seemed alive with his fierce redskin foes.

Some of them, dropping their weapons, plunged into the swirling waters, and with powerful strokes made for him through the storm of wind and rain.

He grappled bravely with the first to come up, and sank beneath the agitated surface in a life-and-death wrestle.

But the fierce redskin was quickly joined by others.

Seized by the throat and helpless in the grip of three powerful dog soldiers, Buffalo Bill was dragged to the bank, and flung fainting on the sodden ground.

A vengeful yell greeted Hailstorm's triumph.

The great Paleface Tracker had been captured at last!

CHAPTER IX.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE SHOSHONE QUEEN.

How many hours or days elapsed from the time of his capture to his triumphant production before the queen of the Shoshone nation in Punnak village Buffalo Bill never knew.

Indeed, he had no means of ascertaining, since he was

placed at the bottom of a canoe and jealously covered up, being fed at long intervals, but always under cover of dark.

It was night, and the storm had not quite spent its violence, when he was suddenly uncovered and dragged forth, to be exposed before the blaze of a mighty fire, the cynosure of hundreds of fierce eyes.

Instinctively he guessed the truth—this was the Punnak village.

Yonder, beyond the great fire, where other though smaller fires sent their smoke-rings curling up into the darkened heavens, rose countless wigwams and lodges.

They rose tier upon tier up the sides of a tremendous hollow, dark and rugged, crowned by immense redwoods, being here and there broken by a leaping cascade, whose dashing waters and clouds of foam sparkled and scintillated in the glow of the great central fire.

The thunder of the falling waters echoed from crag to crag through that mighty hollow.

The scene was weird in its startling contrasts, for, as Buffalo Bill swept his glance around, he espied in the distance, beyond a dark, pine-clad ridge, portions of immense walls, flanked by pinnacles of astounding size, which gleamed like burnished brass.

Further still, there loomed indistinctly a mighty mass which was neither forest nor mountain.

All this he took in at a glance, for his speculations were quickly directed into another channel.

In his immediate vicinity, grouped about the mighty fire, and forming a semi-circle around the upper portion of a circular lake, were many hundred Shoshone warriors and braves in all the glory of war-paint and feathers. They were armed to the teeth, while the majority carried the scalp-decked, keen-pointed lances.

These were the members of High Lance's band.

Those nearest to the water, and but few in number relatively, were armed with rifles and tomahawks; some, indeed, carried revolvers—a grim but sure testimony to the massacre of the pioneer gold-seekers.

The moment Buffalo Bill was dragged forth they closed around him, while a yell burst from the crowd such as in all his experience he had never heard equaled. It was deafening, ear-splitting, and calculated to try the most iron-nerved. It sent a cold shiver down his spine.

That some extraordinary event was impending he guessed from the manner of his captors, but its especial nature was hard to divine, since there were no indications of a coming scalp or war dance. Next, his limbs were liberated, and held in the powerful grasp of four dog soldiers, he was led through a double line of High Lance's braves.

Every eye was upon him, while a fresh burst of savage war-whoops greeted his progress toward the fire-lit village.

Hailstorm had disappeared, but presently Buffalo Bill espied him standing just outside one of the largest teepees in the village.

Nor was he alone, for hard by stood High Lance.

Neither of the two chiefs seemed on the best of terms, a circumstance that was hardly surprising, seeing they were both bent on proving their superior claims for the hand of the queen.

High Lance was scarcely inclined to give his rival the full credit for the capture of Buffalo Bill.

Hailstorm, being fully alive to the importance of the capture, was quick to resent his rival's slurs.

Led forward by the four dog soldiers, Buffalo Bill was ushered into the tepee.

A group of fantastically-garbed Punnak Mystery Men were assembled, each bearing aloft a lighted pine-torch.

By a simultaneous flourish they swept a blaze of light full upon the important captive.

At the same moment a flap was turned up at the further end of the tepee, and a handsome maiden, tall and supple, clothed in a robe of beaver-skins, and wearing a wampum of gold about her waist, moved softly in.

Behind her towered a weirdly horrible figure.

Buffalo Bill divined at a glance that this was Great Snake, the chief Mystery Man.

He wore a mask shaped like the head of a gigantic rattler, his medicine dress being strung with skins of deformed animals, reptiles, and birds—the hops of animals with the claws and toe-nails of birds.

He carried no weapons, but a wand, fashioned in rude resemblance to a snake, whose extended fangs contained near the fork a small, oddly-shaped crystal, scintillating with all the colors of the rainbow, as it caught the reflection of the torches.

This latter object recalled vividly to Buffalo Bill's mind the queerly-shaped crystal he had removed from the person of the Mystery Man whom he had slain.

He still possessed it, and he felt a certain amount of curiosity to learn its properties.

Seemingly, it was an emblem peculiar to the Mystery Men, for he observed nothing of the kind in the possession of either the warriors or dog soldiers.

The Great Snake, as Buffalo Bill had already gleaned, was the father of the Shoshone queen.

Yet no greater contrast was possible than between the handsome, graceful maiden and her hideously-disguised parent.

As the newcomers stepped forward, the Mystery Men lowered their torches and made a kind of obeisance—an example which the dog soldiers and Hailstorm, their leader, were not slow to follow.

• Buffalo Bill, who for the moment was released by his captors, remained stolidly upright.

Both Sour Tongue and the Great Snake eyed him curiously.

His fame had preceded him, and the fact that the great Paleface Tracker was a prisoner in the Punnak fastness added immeasurably to Hailstorm's importance.

His less fortunate rival had not been admitted to the tepee.

Springing to his feet, the chief of the dog soldiers addressed the queen:

"Behold, Sour Tongue, queen of the Shoshone nation, Hailstorm has succeeded where all other chiefs have failed!" he cried, proudly.

"The great Buffalo Chief is his prisoner.

"Hailstorm might have borne his scalp into the village of the Mystery Chief.

"He has brought the great Buffalo Chief alive, and delivers him into the hands of the queen of the Shoshone nation.

"Hailstorm has spoken; let Sour Tongue say whether his speech finds favor in her ears."

By way of response, the maiden turned a look, half-defiant, half-entreating upon the chief of the dog soldiers.

Buffalo Bill concluded that, while her heart favored Hailstorm's policy, some other motive equally powerful made her anxious to conciliate High Lance.

The last-named chief was ushered in by one of the assembled Mystery Men.

"The tongue of the dog chief speaks crooked!" he cried, addressing himself more particularly to the Great Snake, although he adopted, in some measure the form of his rival by addressing the girl-queen by name.

"Let Sour Tongue hearken to the words of High Lance, and judge between the two warrior chiefs of the Shoshones.

"Two moons ago, High Lance fell upon the enemies of the Punnak Mystery Men, the dogs of Apaches, who call themselves Men of the Wood.

"Full fifty scalps High Lance took, and not one of the Apache warriors escaped.

"He was returning to the village of his fathers, when he found two paleface chiefs in the hunting-grounds of his nation.

"They slew the Mystery Man, the servant of the Great Snake, and High Lance vowed their destruction."

A murmur of approval broke from the grotesquely-clad torch-bearers, while their chief, the Great Snake, struck his lance, or wand, thrice sharply on the ground.

Sour Tongue and Hailstorm exchanged a furtive look, which, to Buffalo Bill, told eloquently of a mutual understanding.

It was clear to him that Hailstorm was no favorite of the Great Snake, the virtual ruler of these fierce redskins.

High Lance, with all an Indian's cunning, had long divined this; and now he was doing his utmost to gain the Great Snake over to his side.

"High Lance mourned two days for the slain Mystery Man, whose body he committed to the water; then, dividing his band into two parties, he followed the palefaces into the mountains.

"He came upon them at the head of Ghost Valley.

"One he captured, but the medicine of the Great Paleface Tracker was strong, and he escaped.

"The Great Spirit, in the watches of the night, whispered to High Lance that the Paleface Tracker would pick up his trail in the hope of saving his paleface friend from the great power of the Mystery Chief.

"Then High Lance pitched his tepee near Mystery Lake.

"The Paleface Tracker followed him, but again his medicine was too strong.

"By what means the paleface escaped from Mystery Lake, High Lance knows not, for neither red nor white man has ever escaped from Mystery Lake before.

"High Lance felt that the time had come to deliver his prisoner to the great Mystery Chief.

"He has done so, and now he seeks the aid of the Great Snake. He claims the Paleface Tracker.

"Let Sour Tongue judge between her two chiefs."

As the wily chief finished, the maiden stepped quickly forward and placed her right hand on Hailstorm's shoulder.

"The queen of the Shoshones is content with the words spoken by the Dog Chief," she said. "The heart of High Lance is bitter. He has appealed to the Great Snake. Let the Great Snake answer him."

She had barely time to finish, ere the Mystery Chief stepped forward.

He was clearly beside himself with rage. His intention was unmistakable; favoring High Lance, he thrust the uncanny wand into the latter's eager grasp.

"This morn the heart of Great Snake is grieved by the words of Sour Tongue; she loves the Dog Chief, and she has judged foolishly.

"It is the will of the Great Spirit that henceforward the Shoshone nation be united under one supreme chief.

"As Sour Tongue cannot choose wisely, let the two warriors settle their dispute here.

"One must fall, and the victor shall claim the hand of the Shoshone queen. The Great Snake has spoken it."

Simultaneously the assembled Mystery Men fell back, and Buffalo Bill, still in the powerful grasp of the four dog soldiers, was dragged to the opening of the tepee.

The rival warriors lost no time over preliminaries. Both discarded their weapons, and with only their scalping-knives, met midway in a fierce wrestle.

A yell of bitter defiance burst from their lips as they grappled in that fierce embrace, which meant certain death to one of them.

The struggle was sharp and deadly, and was brought to a speedy issue.

Hailstorm, being the cooler, prevailed.

One well-directed stroke robbed his rival of life, and made him undisputed chief of the Shoshone nation.

Buffalo Bill's four guards raised a triumphant war-whoop, while Sour Tongue directed an anxious look toward the Mystery Chief, who apparently had not anticipated the issue.

He recoiled with a grunt of anger.

Quick to follow up the advantage he had gained, Hailstorm addressed Great Snake:

"Behold Great Father of Mysteries, the Dog Chief has prevailed, and the hand of Sour Tongue is his. To Great Snake she gives his prisoner, but the medicine of the paleface is strong. Hailstorm would warn the Mystery Man to guard the paleface closely."

"Hailstorm has spoken wisely," said the Mystery Chief, making a sign to one or two of the torch-bearers, who instantly stepped to Buffalo Bill's side, while the dog soldiers retreated.

Their fierce eyes seemed turned upon him in a hungry manner—evidently they anticipated what followed.

The chief of the Mystery Men moved to the opening of the tepee with Sour Tongue and Hailstorm on each side; then, in a deep, sonorous voice, he announced to the assembled village that the Great Spirit, being angry with High Lance for his failure to capture the Buffalo Chief, had destroyed him, and made Hailstorm undisputed chief of the Shoshone nation.

A deep silence, broken at last by a few ominous mutterings, greeted this announcement.

The cunning Mystery Man saw that something was needed to appease the warriors, who had regarded High Lance as head chief.

He called the leading warriors together, and for some minutes held an animated discussion with them.

Subsequently Buffalo Bill learned that the warriors disputed the power of his medicine, and demanded a satisfactory trial of the same before the assembled nation.

This Great Snake agreed to, and preparations were at once made to settle the point of dispute by putting the daring scout to a test of skill and courage such as rarely falls to the lot of any mortal.

The exact nature of this trial Buffalo Bill had no means of ascertaining until it was actually thrust upon him.

Kept a close prisoner in the tepee, carefully guarded by the Mystery Men, he was not led forth till something like a couple of hours had elapsed; then, surrounded by a score of Mystery Men, he was being finally brought to the open space near the head of the circular lake.

A striking alteration had been made. The immense fire blazed up in the very middle of an inclosed square, several hundred feet in extent.

The sides of the square were composed of pine branches closely packed together, reaching to a height of some four feet from the ground.

Behind these barriers were grouped warriors, braves, squaws, and papposes, waiting in eager silence for the coming trial, which was to decide the quality of the Buffalo Chief's "medicine."

Buffalo Bill was led toward the fire by his captors.

His weapons had long since been removed, consequently his feelings of surprise may be imagined when the hideously-disguised medicine chief stepped forward and thrust a very long, keen-edged scalping-knife into his hand.

The silence was profound, when the Great Snake addressed the surprised, yet helpless prisoner:

"The warriors of the Shoshone nation have heard the fame of the Paleface Tracker, whose medicine is stronger than the medicine of the bravest warriors.

"But their hearts are sad, and the words of the Great Snake have failed to reach their hearts.

"They would try the medicine of the Paleface Tracker.

"It is well, for the Mystery Chief, who can read the secrets of the Great Spirit, knows that the Paleface Tracker will prevail.

"His medicine is strong, but the medicine of Great Snake is stronger.

"Now listen, warriors of the Shoshone nation: it is the will of the Great Snake that when the Paleface Tracker shall prevail, he shall pass through the village unharmed, and go where he will till the sun rise; then, if he be seen by a warrior, let the warrior slay him if he can.

"But, hearken all, the Paleface Tracker is doomed.

"Before another moon shall come and go, his scalp shall be fastened in the temple of the Great Spirit. The Mystery Chief has spoken; his words are good."

Buffalo Bill listened to this harangue with a curious sense of helplessness, being unable to divine the wily red-skin's motive for making those few hours of grace a condition in the event of his successful issue through the coming ordeal.

What this ordeal might be, he had, as yet, no means of

judging; for, contrary to all expectation, his guards followed their leader from the inclosure, leaving him alone, unbound, and armed with the naked scalping-knife.

As the Mystery Men withdrew, a deafening yell burst from the watching throng, to be instantly followed by a shrill chant, which jarred on the bewildered scout's nerves most horribly.

The whole Shoshone nation was watching him with cruel, eager eyes, and, by a supreme effort of the will, he retained his composure.

Presently the warriors lining the inclosure began to move around in a circle, with short, measured steps.

Simultaneously, those beyond, including the whole of the vast concourse, took up the uncanny refrain, while small parties of the Mystery Men began to fill in the open spaces in three of the four corners of the inclosure.

The scene was horrible in the extreme.

The hideous faces of the warriors, streaked in war-paint, the fantastic dress of the Mystery Men, together with the frightful din, which grew louder and louder as the warriors danced faster yet faster, their forms flashing in the red glow of the great fire.

All at once Buffalo Bill caught sight of Hailstorm, who, surrounded by his principal dog soldiers, was making for the only means of ingress.

At the same moment he started back, literally staggered by the horrible nature of his surroundings. A thread of flame shot from corner to corner all along the inclosure; then, as the inflammable substance kindled, ribbons of flames streaked upward. He was hemmed in by walls of living fire!

Yet no sooner had he become alive to this danger, than he was confronted by another, while the true nature of the ordeal was made plain to him.

His enemies had let loose a mountain-lion, and the great, tawny beast, maddened by the proximity of the flames, and catching sight of the human victim, sprang forward, uttering a thunderous growl.

In a moment Buffalo Bill had nerved himself for the encounter, while the cougar stopped short in an attitude not unlike that of a cat when about to leap.

At close quarters the brute looked twice his real size.

His mask and forepaws were stained with blood, and as he watched Buffalo Bill, he licked his lips with a relish that sent a cold shiver down the scout's back.

Fortunately, Buffalo Bill was sufficiently versed in the brute's habits to know what tactics to adopt at the onset. He knew that the cougar always strikes with its forepaws, like a cat, lacerating its victim with its sharp claws, drawing with its muscular forearm until the fatal bite may be inflicted, the brute invariably striving to bite its victim in the head.

Quick as thought he snatched off his jacket, and, holding it before him with his left hand, advanced toward the crouching monster. This movement precipitated the cougar's leap.

Simultaneously, Buffalo Bill sprang aside, and the monster, with a howl of rage and fear, landed hard by the great central fire. Wheeling sharply about, he rushed at the daring scout, allowing the latter no time to execute a similar maneuver.

With rare presence of mind, Buffalo Bill hurled his coat into the monster's face.

Blinded by the garment, and taken at a disadvantage, the animal sprang into the air, and, by good fortune, missed the scout.

Then, leaping back a pace, Buffalo Bill waited his opportunity, and as soon as it arrived, thrust forward at the beast's side with all the strength at his command.

The blow took the brute behind the shoulder and between the ribs.

With a growl of pain the monster stumbled and rolled upon its side.

For a brief space there followed a fearful struggle, illumined by the sea of fire, and watched by the savage crowd with bated breath. To Buffalo Bill all was vague. The great foam-flecked face and gleaming teeth of the brute came perilously near his shoulder.

Deeper and deeper he drove the scalping-knife into the cougar's body, and by swerving to one side, he escaped the monster's great paws.

At last, after what seemed an eternity of suspense, he felt the slackening of the great body, the movement of the legs became gradually less, then the monster's head fell back with a groan, and he knew that the victory was his.

He staggered to his feet, and as he did so, a yell went up from the Mystery Men. The medicine of the Paleface Tracker had proved equal to the occasion, a happening which none forgot had been foretold by the Great Snake.

The circumstance was recalled to Buffalo Bill's mind by the grim silence which followed.

He was free till break of day!

Could he, in that interval, effect Wild Bill's release?

That was the thought uppermost in his mind, as with the blood-stained scalping-knife in one hand, and the remnant of his jacket in the other, he moved boldly and confidently through the narrow aperture at the further end of that vast square of fire.

Warriors, braves, and squaws all fell back at his approach, regarding him with looks akin to awe. He had astounded them, but at no little cost to himself, for the wound he had received in his shoulder, when captured by Hailstorm's dog soldiers, was bleeding afresh, while the tremendous exertion had taxed his strength more than he cared to show.

He made his way to a group consisting of Hailstorm, the Mystery Chief, Sour Tongue, and several dog soldiers.

"Does the Great Snake suppose his medicine is stronger than the medicine of the paleface?" he demanded, boldly, narrowly scanning the group for some sign of relenting.

"The Great Snake has spoken; let the paleface escape from the Punnak village if he can," was the Mystery Chief's grim rejoinder.

Buffalo Bill adopted a bold course.

Going up to the disguised savage, he said, sternly:

"The paleface seeks to escape, but not alone. He would see his paleface brother. Let the Great Snake beware how he harms his paleface prisoner; for every tree in the red man's hunting-grounds the pale nation can count a warrior.

"If harm befalls the Great Snake's prisoner, not all the Shoshone warriors can save the Punnak village from the paleface soldiers."

The speech was not without effect. The Mystery Chief started slightly; nevertheless, his retort was equally hostile.

"The words of the paleface are empty," he said.

"This night the Great Spirit has appointed the paleface prisoner to die. Would the Buffalo Chief behold the death of his brother?"

"But let him remember that the medicine of the Mystery Man is strong, stronger than the strongest medicine of the paleface warriors.

"These are the words of the Great Snake.

"The Buffalo Chief is warned," and so saying, he glided away.

Buffalo Bill gazed from one to another of the fierce crowd.

His position was certainly novel, being free to move where he chose till break of day, and then at the mercy of the first redskin who cared to make a bid for his scalp.

A wild thought occurred to him to spring upon Hailstorm and avenge Wild Bill's end upon him; but by so doing he would only precipitate matters, and he dismissed the plan as impracticable.

He turned aside to hide alike his chagrin as well as a feeling of faintness that was stealing over him.

Leaving the hideous crowd behind, he directed his steps to the higher ground where the village stood.

His whole thoughts were centered upon Wild Bill's danger; yet, try as he might, it was impossible to arrive at any plan which gave even the slightest promise of success.

Judging roughly, the village numbered considerably over a thousand souls, while its commanding position in that wild mountain fastness rendered futile any hope of escape.

Yet he was not inclined to remain inactive, a passive spectator of Wild Bill's fate.

Buffalo Bill, in all his vast and varied experiences, failed to recall anything exactly like the present.

Nevertheless he was not the sort of man to give way to despair.

The first thing needful was to attend to his immediate wants, consisting of food, suitable weapons, and an effectual disguise.

Clearly he could do nothing in his present state.

By the time he came to this decision he was well inside the village, and seemingly unobserved.

The tepees rose tier after tier upon the mountain-side. Small fires gleamed in all directions through the timber, and these twinkled and flashed like danger-signals.

Below, the scene resembled a horrible nightmare.

By the immense camp-fire he could see the hideously bedecked crowd whirling around and around in a fierce ecstasy.

Most of the Mystery Men were brandishing lighted torches, which sent forth streams of flame and smoke.

They were performing the mysterious ghost-dance, always a prelude to the death of an important captive.

For a while Buffalo Bill watched the ghastly scene, stunned and bewildered by his own helplessness.

Then, like a flash of hope, a plan occurred to him.

With trembling eagerness, he scanned the vast amphitheatre of rocks, taking particular note of the lake and the tremendous cascade which evidently fed it.

The fireglow dimly illumined nearly the whole of the vast hollow, and from his point of vantage he was enabled to catch a glimpse of the mysterious ruins to the west.

It was, however, an object behind them which arrested his particular notice—a long stretch of shimmering, perpendicular rock.

Could it be the Wall of Gold Mine?

At another time the sight would have fascinated him. It served a different purpose now.

It rendered him desperate.

In attempting to reach that mine, situated in the very heart of the Punnak fastness, the man who had led the pioneers had been actuated by a motive little short of criminal rashness.

Owing to one man's folly, scores of valuable lives had been lost, while his and Wild Bill's were now in imminent jeopardy.

Smothering an exclamation of anger, Buffalo Bill once more directed his attention to his own immediate surroundings.

Far below, on the lowest slope, stood the tepee where Hailstorm and High Lance had fought out their struggle for supremacy.

On a ledge directly above it, a large and imposing lodge, decorated with scalps, marked the wigwam of a chief warrior.

It attracted his notice chiefly owing to the movement of a figure in the vicinity.

Presently he observed the movement again, and then a warrior crept noiselessly inside.

The redskin was armed to the teeth, and apparently bent on effecting a surprise.

Instantly Buffalo Bill divined his object. He was one of High Lance's band bent on secreting himself in Hailstorm's wigwam to avenge his chief's death.

Here was the opportunity Buffalo Bill had longed for.

If he could secure the red man's weapons and disguise, it would mean the initial bid for success!

CHAPTER X.

REDSKIN MAGIC.

Moving down the slope with all the stealth of a redskin on the warpath, Buffalo Bill approached the lodge from behind, and cautiously raised one of the flaps an inch or so from the ground. He was not mistaken.

The marauding warrior was in the act of concealing himself beneath a pile of bearskins.

Accommodating his own movements to those of the redskin, in order that any sound he made might be covered by his enemy, he wormed his way beneath the flap, and stole softly up to Hailstorm's would-be assailant.

The redskin heard him as he got within striking distance.

Instantly he essayed to leap to his feet, but Buffalo Bill was too quick.

With a spring he landed full upon the warrior's chest, and ere the latter could use the scalping-knife in his grasp, Buffalo Bill, seizing him by the hair, struck his head backward to the ground with stunning force.

Without a groan, without a cry, the redskin's muscles relaxed, and he lay back stunned and helpless.

Buffalo Bill's first act was to gag him; then, divest-

ing him of his war-trappings, and taking care to remove his feathers and wampum, as well as his tomahawk and war-lance, the daring scout proceeded to deck himself out in the Shoshone garb.

By adroitly manipulating three Apache scalps, he made a wig which, while it completely covered his own hair, resembled as nearly as possible the long, lank hair of the warrior he was bent on impersonating.

There was plenty of war-paint in the lodge, consisting of red and white clay, vermilion and charcoal mixed with bear's grease.

By covering his hands, arms, neck, and shoulders with the charcoal and bear's grease, and his face with a thick daubing of white clay and vermilion, he effectually altered his appearance; then, slipping on the Shoshone warrior's leggins, fringed with scalp-locks, his breech-cloth, moccasins, and beaver's robe, his disguise was completed by the long train of dyed eagle's feathers, reaching from his head downward.

This done, he made a hasty meal off some cold roast venison, and then, as his denuded assailant began to show signs of recovery, he wisely fastened the latter's ankles and wrists in such a manner as to render movement impossible.

He was loath to leave his own clothes behind, but since there was no help for it, he fastened them up in a bundle and thrust them beneath the ashes of the fire-hole in the center of the lodge. They would be consumed by the red-hot embers long before Hailstorm entered.

The only thing of value he possessed was the curious talisman which he had taken from the Mystery Man attached to High Lance's band.

Pulling it out, he thrust it carelessly into the wampum pocket; then, snatching up his captive's war-lance and tomahawk, he emerged from the lodge.

So far fate had dealt kindly with him.

Being fully equipped, he was ready to put his daring plan into operation.

This consisted of making a bold dash to rescue Wild Bill at the critical moment, following this up by taking to the water before his enemies could recover from their surprise.

Nevertheless, when he stepped forth and viewed the scene below, it was borne in upon him that his plan would need some revising.

The Mystery Men held the field entirely to themselves. Adorned in full regalia of relics, paint, bears' claws, and other oddments, they were yelling and leaping around some inanimate object stretched upon the ground near the central fire.

Buffalo Bill guessed only too surely that the object was none other than his friend, Wild Bill.

He saw the hideous figure of the Mystery Chief leap into the air to the accompaniment of an uncanny scream from the rest. The crowd stood back at a distance of something like fifty paces from the circle of Mystery Men.

Here and there, as Buffalo Bill moved down, he caught a glimpse of a few glowing embers, all that remained of the inclosure which had hemmed him in during his terrible struggle with the mountain lion.

At last, and not without some trepidation, he reached the crowd of squaws, braves, and warriors.

Would they detect his disguise, or would they regard him as one of themselves? was the question uppermost in his mind.

He made his way as rapidly as possible to where a small party of warriors had gathered; there, at least, he would attract least notice.

Nor were his calculations far out.

He found to his great relief that the warriors never once suspected his identity, while, mingling with them, he soon learned some particulars of Wild Bill's impending fate.

He found that the Mystery Men were displaying the power of their magic for the edification of the crowd; that when Wild Bill had been brought into a state of absolute helplessness, the Great Snake would give the word, and the warriors were forthwith to cast the helpless captive into the midst of the blazing pile.

So strong was the Mystery Chief's magic considered, that the victim, who was neither gagged nor bound, would be incapable of offering resistance or uttering a sound. In silent anguish he would be consumed before their eyes.

How much of this was true, and how much was merely the outcome of blind superstition, Buffalo Bill had yet to discover.

He found his task no easy one.

To play the part of a warrior, and yet listen to the horrible speculations of the rest upon the subject of his friend's death, tried his courage and patience almost to breaking point.

Still, with the knowledge that Wild Bill's life hung upon the success of the daring plan he had thought out, he contrived to master his feelings, and bide his time.

All at once the circle of Mystery Men opened out, enabling Buffalo Bill to obtain a brief glimpse of his prostrate friend.

Wild Bill was stretched out at full length upon the ground, bound hand and foot, but as the Mystery Men fell back, their leader knelt beside the captive and severed the thongs securing his limbs. Then, with lightning speed, before Wild Bill could move, he made a number of furious passes, his brown, shriveled hands working up and down and from side to side with the speed of a pair of humming birds.

Suddenly the Mystery Chief sprang up and began to dance around the recumbent figure. At the same time a strange cry seemed to creep up from the ground. It was caused by some of the Mystery Men, while others now began to file into the open, uttering a wild, droning cry, repeating the same bar again and again, though each time in a higher key, until it seemed impossible that they could reach a key still higher.

The moment, however, they reached the climax, a deeper note sounded, and others took up the refrain.

From a faint whisper the noise changed to a cry, and then to a shriek.

All at once there was a pause, followed by a sharp, metallic beating.

A faint cry uprose, which grew deeper, when the warriors joined in, shriller when the squaws took up the refrain, and furious when the entire crowd caught the highest note and hung to it with the full force of their lungs.

It died away in a series of long drawn-out echoes.

Again the faint, trembling cry began to ascend, then ceased with startling abruptness.

Simultaneously the Mystery Chief bent over his prisoner. Wild Bill was motionless, and seemed absolutely devoid of life.

Buffalo Bill's heart beat anxiously.

His attention was suddenly called off by a sickly odor, which struck him full in the face. Glancing around, he saw a number of the Mystery Men filing through the crowd, each carrying a great bunch, or torch, of what looked like grass that had been steeped in some resinous substance.

These they waved above their heads to keep them alight, handing them finally to their companions in the open circle.

At the same moment the Mystery Men in the circle began their dance. They went very slowly at first, softly waving their evil-smelling torches.

Gradually they became excited, and moved faster and faster, until they resembled electric figures.

As they danced they raised the torches frantically, and shrieked at the top of their voices.

Flying bits of grass flew through the air, and settled everywhere.

To Buffalo Bill, almost overpowered by the sickly odor, the whole thing seemed like some half-waking dream.

It was unreal and unnatural.

A mad longing possessed him to plunge his war-lance into the heart of the hideous Medicine Chief; moreover, the suspense was beginning to try even his well-steeled nerves.

The circle of dancers parting suddenly, enabled him to get another glimpse of his friend's body.

Wild Bill lay there entirely motionless, at a distance of several yards from his cruel foes, who still continued to dance, but with a slower motion, while at the same time they lowered their evil-smelling torches almost to the ground.

That the crucial moment was near at hand, Buffalo Bill had little difficulty in guessing, for the utmost excitement was now evinced by the crowd.

He kept his gaze alternately upon Great Snake and the apparently lifeless prisoner.

All at once a faint murmur broke from the watching redskins, and Buffalo Bill felt his heart give a jump, as, peering forward, he beheld a sight such as he could never have imagined possible; such as, indeed, he had never beheld in all his experiences with the Indians.

The body of Wild Bill was gradually rising from the ground! He was as rigid as a bar of iron, and ascended very slowly, not with jerks, but with a regular, silent movement, until he had obtained a height of about three feet above the ground, and here he stopped and hung without a quiver or a motion on his bed of air, outraging all the laws of gravitation.

Buffalo Bill was unable to restrain an exclamation of wonder and alarm. The sight was uncanny, gruesome; that it was no optical illusion was patent, for the bottom of Wild Bill's jacket was hanging down and stirring faintly in the breeze.

His hands were rigid at his sides, as though bound there, and his entire body was as straight and stiff as a length of board.

Suddenly the torches flickered out, and the captive began to descend in the same slow and stately manner, until his body rested again upon the ground.

This was the moment which the eager warriors had been awaiting.

With an abruptness that was fairly startling, the Mystery Men glided from the scene of their operations, leaving their chief standing over the body of his victim.

Suddenly he raised both arms, and at once a rush was made for Wild Bill.

Hailstorm and two dog soldiers were first to reach the helpless scout. In a moment they had snatched him up. But that moment was their last.

With a yell such as no Shoshone could ever equal, Buffalo Bill dashed to his friend's rescue. One swift, unerring stroke with his war-lance, and the keen point was buried deep in Hailstorm's heart.

Wild Bill was dropped heavily to the ground, as the dog soldiers turned fiercely upon the disguised scout.

As yet neither they nor the Great Snake had recognized him; and, taking prompt advantage of their confusion, he struck down the nearest with a terrible blow from his tomahawk.

The Mystery Chief raised a warning cry, but the cry came too late to save his own life.

Buffalo Bill brought his weapon around like a flash of light, aiming the blow at the disguised chief's neck.

It struck the Mystery Chief just over the heart, and he dropped, bellowing like a bull buffalo.

The fate of the Great Snake seemed to arouse the amazed crowd to action, though it was not until Buffalo Bill assisted his friend to rise that they guessed the truth.

The Mystery Men were the first to apprise them of Buffalo Bill's disguise.

A fierce rush was made for him. Lifted off his feet by half a dozen sinewy arms, an effort was made to fling him headlong into the fire.

He was saved by something little short of a miracle.

The Mystery Man's talisman, which, when completing his disguise, he had thrust carelessly into the wampum pocket, rolled out, alighting upon the edge of the great fire. Then a wonderful thing happened. The yelling crowd surged around with upraised weapons, which next moment were quivering in a light of intense brilliancy.

Simultaneously the redskins, warriors, braves, and Mystery Men alike, fell back, uttering cries of abject fear.

Dropped by the very edge of the fire, Buffalo Bill sprang up, and with difficulty, owing to the almost blinding properties of the light, groped his way to where Wild Bill had fallen.

"Quick, Bill! Don't you know me?" he cried, dragging the latter to his feet. "There's a chance now, if we can reach the water in time. I rather fancy those red fiends have had enough magic to last them a lifetime. Anyway, while this blaze lasts, they don't seem inclined to follow. Quick! Here we are."

A painful sigh of relief was the only reply Buffalo Bill received from his friend.

Wild Bill's faculties seemed numbed; indeed, his daring companion was forced to guide him like a child. Five war canoes were fastened near the head of the lake, and thither Buffalo Bill directed his flight.

The moment, however, that Wild Bill sighted the welcome craft, he seemed to shake off the stupor which had held him spellbound so long.

He stopped short and gripped his companion fiercely.

Buffalo Bill's quick laugh disarmed his fears, and for the first time he recognized beneath the grotesque disguise his chief and friend.

"Buffler, old pard! is it you? Thank Heaven!" he gasped.

"I guess them red fiends fixed me some close to the big divide.

"Them magic rites war darned frightful.

"Ef we gets outer this yere hole, no power on earth will induce J. B. Hikok ter make this trail again."

"I'm aiming to get out, Bill; but I reckon it's going to be a close shave. The redskins are after us."

"Sink them canoes, Buffler!" said Wild Bill, hurriedly.

The same thought had entered Buffalo Bill's swiftly working mind, and both simultaneously catching up heavy stones, dashed them through the frail bottoms of two of the craft, which immediately began to settle rapidly in the water. Hastily severing the connecting leathern thongs from the wrecks, they leaped into the foremost canoe, and Wild Bill, seizing a paddle, sent the craft swiftly over the rippling water.

But the pursuing Shoshones had already reached the bank, and in a moment the remaining two vessels were manned by about a score of hideously bedizened red fiends, while the rest of the dog warriors, headed by one of the minor chiefs, dashed off through the undergrowth to follow by land.

To a chorus of shrill yells and deafening war-whoops the chase had begun.

The situation of the two men was indeed desperate.

They had but barely eighty yards' start of their pursuers, who were gaining on them perceptibly with almost every stroke of the paddles.

Wild Bill, weakened as he was by the terrible hours of mental and physical suffering through which he had just passed, could not perform such an amount of effective work as could his companion, whose strength had been comparatively untaxed, and though he struggled manfully for about half a mile, the terrible exertion was too much for him.

Hardly a word passed between the two, as on they sped, the moon fitfully stealing through the dense clouds overhead, showing them occasional glimpses of the dark forms of their pursuers moving swiftly through the undergrowth upon the shore on the one hand, and those in the canoe, churning the water about them into seething foam, as they forced it with strenuous strokes nearer and nearer to the quarry.

In grim silence the two men struggled on, till at length Buffalo Bill, noticing the failing strength of his companion, began to cast about in his mind for some plan of action which would be swift and decisive.

They were comparatively unarmed, but for the lance and tomahawk which he had taken from the Shoshone warrior, and another tomahawk which they had found lying in the bottom of the canoe, left by its last occupant.

On they pressed, Buffalo Bill silently working with magnificent energy in the stern, planning swiftly some

way of escape, and Wild Bill, panting and paddling with the energy of despair, in the bow of the frail craft.

In a few moments the resourceful mind of the scout had formed a plan, as magnificent as it was desperate, and simultaneously with his mental decision came a choking cry from Wild Bill.

"It's no go. Buffler, old pard, I ain't got another ounce of push lef' in me.

"I'm blamed sad ter think yer've got into this mess all for the sake of a puddle-headed coyote like me, pard, and I guess it 'ud 'a' been a sight better for yer to hev left me up at the camp ter die at fu'st at the hands o' them dirty red fiends.

"All ther same, I respects and thanks yer fer yer devotion, Buffler, and I'm on'y sayin' thet I'm sad ter think I've led yer in ter this mess."

"Nonsense, Bill, we're not by any means dead yet, and while we've got a chance we'll take it, and I should think myself a coward to have left you to death by torture, because I saw an opportunity of saving my own skin. But now is the time for action, Bill, so the tighter we can keep our heads shut on the subject of sentiment the better. Do you just keep the canoe moving while I attend to these fiends behind. We've little to fear, I think, from those on the shore, as we're too far out to be reached by a tomahawk, and they have no rifles as far as I know."

Coolly and collectedly spoke the scout, as if not a breath of danger threatened, and Wild Bill turned as he paddled to gaze with admiration and almost with awe at the iron-nerved Buffalo Bill.

Not a sign did the scout give of his intention, and not a word of explanation did he vouchsafe by way of answer to the astonished questioning gaze of his companion.

He sat silently gazing astern at the pursuing craft, and when at last the leading canoe was within about a dozen yards, he rose swiftly, and grasping a tomahawk in his right hand, and the Shoshone lance in his left, stood for a moment poised the hatchet ready for the throw.

Then did Wild Bill understand the "chance" which his companion had referred to, and immediately he concentrated his attention on steadying the frail bark, so that the scout should have every opportunity of making a true aim with the weapon.

Nearer and nearer came the pursuing craft; the redskins, either at a loss to understand this strange maneuver of their foes, or merely regarding the pursuit as finished and the victory with themselves, uttered no sound, and only the vicious splashing of the paddles, and the hissing of the foam they tore up, broke the deathlike stillness.

They were but ten yards off now, and the intervening space was lessening every moment, eight, seven, six, five, and then like a flash the glittering weapon left the hand of Buffalo Bill on its errand of destruction.

The Indians raised a yell of terror and rage as they saw the course the tomahawk was taking, and endeavored to back the canoe out of danger. But too late! the aim of the scout had been unerring, and the hatchet with an ugly "zip" tore through the bow of the leading canoe, just below the water-line.

In a moment the craft was half full of water, and would have sunk, but a warrior, evidently of more resource than the rest, sprang forward, and placing a leather pouch over the jagged hole, endeavored to stop the inrush.

But Buffalo Bill had foreseen some such possible event, and like a flash he cast his lance, transfixing the Indian, who flung up his left arm, and pitched over into the waves, unluckily for his comrades, retaining his grasp on the edge of the hole and ripping a great sheet of bark from the side of the frail craft as he fell.

In another second the canoe had sunk, and its late occupants were struggling in the water.

As soon as he had seen the success of his maneuver, the scout again seized his paddle, and commenced to place as much distance between the enemy as he could; in this he was aided by his companion, for in the short time that sufficed for these incidents to take place, Wild Bill had had an opportunity for a brief rest, of which he had availed himself, and the two sped on again in silence.

In a little while Cody turned his head to glance at the pursuers, and then with a glad cry he called a halt.

"See, pard," he said, "we've had the good fortune to win the victory with two single blows."

It was indeed so.

As soon as the foremost canoe had sunk, its occupants had immediately made for its consort, and the united rush to the side of the little craft had been too much for it, and even as the scout watched it capsized, and a score of dusky warriors were struggling in the stream.

Yells and guttural exclamations of baffled rage were borne to his ears, as the dark forms of the swimming redskins at length reached the bank.

The pursuers on the shore had abandoned the chase when it became apparent to them that, without the aid of the war canoes to capture or drive the scouts ashore, there would be nothing to gain by their continuance of it alone.

A long silence ensued, as the two companions paddled slowly on, which was at last broken by Wild Bill.

"Waal, Buffler," he said, "I guess I owes yer something more'n thanks fer this yer night's work—something as I reckon I shall be glad ter give yer jes' as soon as yer wants it, and thet something is my life, pard.

"Twice in a few hours yer has saved me ther mortification o' hevin' ter pass in my checks ter a parcel o' dog-

goned red fiends, and I'm blamed sensible of the debt I owes yer."

He ceased paddling as he finished speaking, and turning about in his place, frankly extended his hand to his friend and protector.

For a moment the scout held it in a silent grasp of friendship.

"Wild Bill," he replied, "we have been together in a good few tight corners lately, and if I have done my duty under trying circumstances, I am assured that it is not more than you would have done had you been in my position, and that if ever I need a gallant comrade to help me out of a mess and you are close by, you will be the first to lend a hand.

"So we'll say no more, pard, for you must not put too much value on the little assistance I have been able to render you to-night."

For about an hour longer they kept on their course.

Wild Bill, espying a little creek, suggested that they should camp on its shores for the night.

Having thrust the nose of the canoe into the reeds, the two men sprang ashore, and sank wearily upon the grassy slope of the bank.

But despite the feeling of comparative security, Buffalo Bill was keenly alive to the fact that they were not by any means out of danger yet.

They were, with the exception of the single remaining tomahawk, and the knife that he had retained, entirely unarmed, cast upon the shore of a lake, at any moment likely to be recaptured by their relentless foes, or stricken with the fever with which the heavy steaming atmosphere was too obviously laden.

A glance at his friend showed him that he was too utterly exhausted to allow them to proceed on their journey before some hours' rest had been taken by him.

Not daring to light a fire, for fear that the smoke should acquaint the foe with their whereabouts, Cody set to work to collect some of the berries which had sustained him in his previous experiences in the mesquite bush, to be eaten in lieu of cooked food.

When this was done, and the two had made a hearty meal—if it could be called a meal—the scout, stretched upon the ground by the side of his comrade, remarked upon the lucky escapes from death by the hands of savages that had come under his notice.

This he did partly to keep up the spirits of his friend, and partly to while away the tedium of waiting for his friend's slow recovery.

"I remember," he said, "old Senator Duncan McArthur telling me of a somewhat similar experience to ours of to-night.

"He was one of a band of three brave scouts, who had escorted a packet-boat from Maysville, Kentucky,

up the Ohio River, to a point past the Big Sandy, where the country was considered safe for the voyagers, and were on their return down the river in a canoe, which had been taken up with them for this purpose.

"When nearly opposite the mouth of the Scioto, a tributary of the Ohio, Duncan said to his companions:

"I say, boys, just put me ashore here, and I'll go up to a deerlick, right over the hill yonder, and see if I can bring in some game. A little fresh meat now will not be a bad thing to take."

"Don't you think it too risky right here now, Duncan?" queried one of his companions. "You know, on our way up, we found a canoe sunk in the mud on the other side of the river, which was proof enough that a party of Indians had crossed over there, and it's just as like as not they're back here again and prowling around; it may be watching us from the very point where you want to land."

"The young man laughed.

"To hear words of caution from Nat Beasley is like listening to the devil quote Scripture," he said, gayly.

"I don't often do it, that's a fact," was the rejoinder, "but somehow I seem to smell Indian in the air to-day."

"Well, I'll risk my part of it if you are not afraid to land me," returned the intrepid Duncan.

"All right, then, and ashore you go, even if it's good-bye forever," said the other, as with his long paddle he sent the canoe toward the land.

"Do you want me to go along with you, Duncan?" asked the other one of the three.

"No, Tom, you had better stay in the canoe with Nat," was the answer. "If there is any danger one will be enough to lose."

"Yes, and one too many, my friend. Shall we wait for you here, or drop along down?"

"Oh, the latter, decidedly, for if the savages are about here they might surprise you and cut us all off. Besides, if they should see you waiting here they would be certain of somebody being ashore, and then they would either attack you or follow me."

"After getting ashore, young Duncan moved cautiously forward, gliding through the bushes almost as silently as a serpent till at length he reached the deerlick, and stretched himself on the ground to patiently await the coming of some creature that would be worth the shooting. No sights or sounds broke the dull monotony of his lonely watch until he found himself unconsciously yielding to a drowsiness that would soon have ended in an unconscious sleep.

"At length rousing himself with a start he looked sharply around, and fancied he saw the bushes carefully parting on the other side of the lick.

"Well, something at last, I hope," he said to himself.

"But the something he saw was not the something he

was wanting to see, for as the bushes parted farther he beheld first the grim face of one savage, and then that of another, pushed cautiously forward, their black eyes seeming to glitter as they surveyed the whole scene before them.

"They had evidently come hither for the same object as himself, the hope of surprising some animal at the spring; and when they found there was none they stepped boldly forward, and stood revealed in the open space around the lick, which the saline overflowing always kept clear and bare of vegetation.

"It was a critical point of time in his adventurous career, and thoughts rapid as lightning whirled and flashed through his dizzy brain, sending a burning heat down through every portion of his physical system.

"At least, if I must die, I will only yield to fate after I have done my best for life," was his mental comment, as he ran his eye along the barrel of his rifle and took deliberate aim at the heart of the most formidable of the two warriors, who chanced to be facing him, and was looking down into the spring. "I can at least kill one of them, and then I shall be man to man with the other."

"With this last determination he pulled the trigger. The forest resounded with a loud explosion, and the Indian he had selected for his target dropped motionless at the feet of his companion, who, contrary to savage precedents, did not turn to fly, but grasped his loaded weapon and pointed it at Duncan.

"There is no merit in waiting here to be shot like a dog," thought the young white borderer, as he suddenly bounded to his feet and ran in a zigzag manner up the hill behind him, to prevent his foe from taking a certain aim.

"With fierce yells of rage the savage darted forward in pursuit.

"As Duncan neared the brow of the hill he glanced over his shoulder to see how great the danger was behind, and perceived the Indian coming at full speed. There was not a moment to be lost, but as he turned his head again to see his course, and made a desperate spring forward, he suddenly, to his horror, found himself entangled in the branches of a fallen tree.

"He was thus caught like an insect in the meshes of a spider, and, while making the most desperate exertions to free himself, his savage pursuer, seeing his predicament, made a quick halt, drew up his gun, took a hasty aim, and fired.

"Fortunately for Duncan, the Indian was not a perfect marksman, or else his firearm did not carry accurately, for the ringing bullet sped past him, but so close to his head as to cause him to cast it to one side instinctively.

"Now, then, that his gun is as empty as mine, I will stand my ground for hand-to-hand fight," muttered the

border scout. 'It shall never be said that I fled like a coward from a single foe.'

"With this he was about to come out of the tree on the same side as he had entered it, when suddenly the forest resounded with a series of the most appalling shrieks and yells that seemed to curdle his blood, brave as he was, and, glancing off to the right, he saw at least a dozen savages come leaping and bounding forward through the bushes.

"Now it was instant flight alone that could save him, and quickly extricating himself from his perilous position, he dashed over and down the opposite side of the hill, the Indians, all screaming, after him in fierce pursuit.

"When he had reached the foot of the declivity he unfortunately had another ridge to ascend, in order to keep the course which would the most speedily take him to the river in sight of his companions, his principal hope.

"As he struggled up the acclivity, therefore, he became a fair target for his bloodthirsty foes, who were in the act of rushing down the opposite slope; and at least twenty shots were fired at him in quick succession, but Providence still kept him unharmed.

"But he was not to escape entirely free, for after a brief interval there came a single shot, as if the marksman had paused for a more deliberate aim, and he felt the shock of something strike his side, and then the blood flowing freely down to his feet. That the ball had passed completely through him, and probably given him a mortal wound, he did not for a moment doubt, and his only wonder was that he still had strength enough to pursue his flight and did not faint nor fall.

"He reached the top of the ridge, ran down the other slope, and up another acclivity, with such wonderful celerity, that his savage pursuers only came in sight of him again as he neared the summit. They had loaded their pieces in the meantime, however, and they all now fired at him again; but though two of the bullets cut his clothes, and one passed through his hat, just barely grazing his scalp, he escaped without another wound.

"This was the last he saw of his foes; and altering his course, a little he ran toward the river, where he hoped to find his companions.

"To his inexpressible joy, as he came in sight of the Ohio, he beheld them nearly opposite to him.

"He shouted to them, and they hastened to the shore, where Duncan met them, blood-covered and out of breath, and really dying, as he believed.

"They were alarmed at his condition, and as soon as they had got safely out into the middle of the stream again, they examined his wound.

"To their great joy and his, it was found that the ball, instead of passing through him, as he had supposed, had

struck his powder-horn, and driven some of the splinters into his flesh, which had caused the blood to flow freely, but in reality had only inflicted a trifling wound, from which he speedily recovered."

A few moments' silence followed the close of Cody's narrative, until he rose from his reclining posture and remarked, with a smile:

"So, you see, Bill, we are not the only ones who occasionally find that they have to be dependent on Providence for a little timely intervention. If McArthur's powder-flask had not intercepted the bullet, and if those rascals had not upset the second canoe themselves tonight, Duncan and you and I might at this moment be exchanging greetings on the other side of the big divide."

After another hour's rest, spent in a peaceful doze by Wild Bill, and in alert and ceaseless vigilance by Cody, the two, as by mental consent, rose, and embarked once more on their journey.

Taking it in turn to propel the canoe, they made rapid progress.

The dawn broke, and found them skirting the great forest.

All through the day and the succeeding night they pressed along, seeking neither rest nor food till they had crossed the portage and recovered the weapons which they had hidden in the bluff where the river took its bend eastward.

Ten days later, weary, ragged, and well-nigh unrecognizable, they entered Long Pine Settlement.

The story of their sufferings, and their description of the Shoshone fastness in the heart of the Sierras, sufficed to deter even the most foolhardy and reckless miners from seeking the Wall of Gold Mine.

Wild Bill never took that trail again. He had been kept a prisoner in the mysterious mine, of which Buffalo Bill had obtained a glimpse, and the horrors of his captivity, together with the temporary loss of his faculties on the night when the Mystery Chief displayed the power of his magic, made him vow that he would never more undertake a trail beyond the prairies.

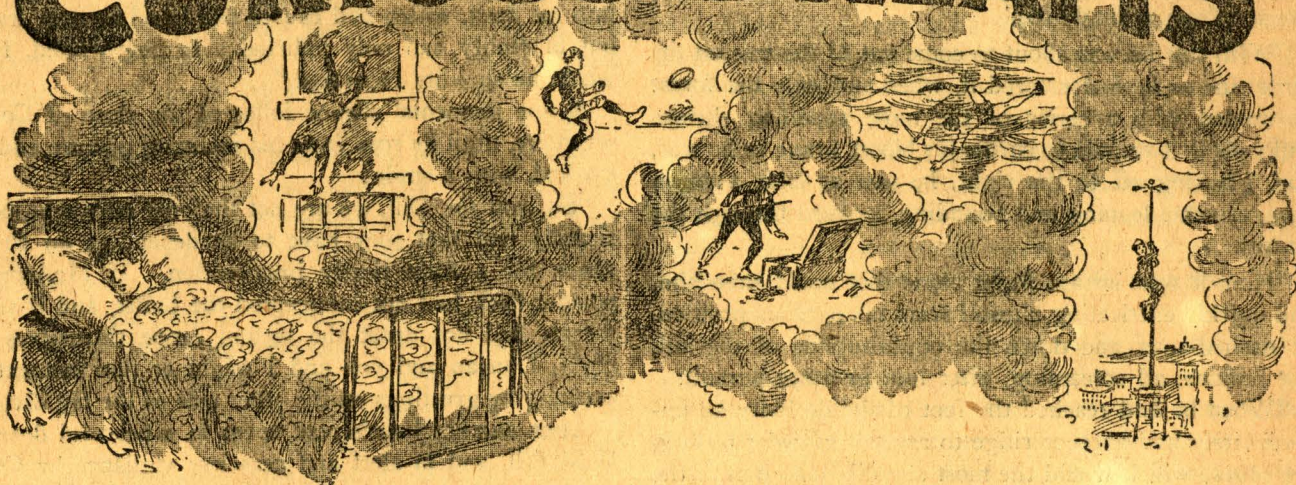
And even Buffalo Bill, although fate destined him to go over the same ground on a subsequent occasion, had no relish to repeat that awful and never-to-be-forgotten experience—his life struggle.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 95, will contain "Buffalo Bill's Gallant Stand; or, the Indian's Last Victory." A story of desperate fighting against the redskins and some of the most thrilling adventures in the life of the greatest of scouts.

Wild journeys in the Bad Lands and the last fight made by the Indians there are described in this issue.

CURIOUS DREAMS



Next week is the last one of the present contest.
So, get a move on you, boys, if you want to get in.
The prizes are worth while.
A little effort will win one.
The new contest will be announced next week.
For full particulars, see page 31.

In Mexico.

(By Robert Welty, Marion, Ohio.)

One hot evening in July, I went to bed quite early, something I had never done before. It took me quite a while to go to sleep, but when I did, I dreamed the following:

I was in Mexico—how I got there I did not know. All I knew is that I got there with my friend, Jack Switzer, a jolly German lad of about sixteen. As we walked along the streets we noticed a very large temple. As we did not know where to go to, we thought we would take a look at the inside. Up the steps we walked, not looking at any one around us, nor caring whether they looked at us or not.

When we got on the inside everything looked grand and magnificent. When, all of a sudden, a score of dark-looking men came rushing on us, yelling like madmen. We started to run, but we did not know where to run to. Suddenly a young boy of about our own age, came rushing out from behind a curtain and yelled to us: "Follow me!" We followed him up one flight of stairs and then another. At last we got to the roof, and there he disappeared.

Jack saw a window, and, looking out, could see the street far below. Suddenly from a side room there came about a dozen of those dark men. When the men who were running us came up with us, they came so fast that they pushed into us so hard that I was knocked out of the window. Down I fell to a great distance. I gave myself up for lost! What was that I struck? It was the telephone wires. That saved my life.

I then began to crawl to the nearest telephone post, and began to descend. As I neared the bottom, to my untold dismay, Jack, whom I left up in the temple, came falling past me. Poor fellow, he was dead before he

reached the ground. But at this juncture I slipped and fell, but as I was near the bottom it did not hurt me very much. Here I awoke to find myself downstairs. I was very sore after my dream. I never knew how I got down except by falling down the stairs. The only thing for me to do was to go back to bed, as it was nearly morning.

A Realistic Dream.

(By Horace E. Wolcott, Weatherford, Okla.)

For the past three years I have been annoyed with somnambulism, or sleep-walking. And the adventure which I am about to relate came very near causing my death.

One day, in Helena, Mont., a friend and myself had visited an old, abandoned gold mine in the near vicinity. That night, having deeply engrossed my thoughts in a fictitious novel of the Crusades of the Druids, I could think of nothing else. On retiring, I found I could not sleep for several hours. Finally, having dropped into a troubled sleep, I dreamed I could not sleep. I thought I was in Peru, in South America. It seemed that I decided to get up and dress myself and pay a visit to the "underground palace of the Druids."

I thought I departed from my room and entered an electrical vehicle of my own contrivance. Having started the electrical machinery in operation, I thought I directed the course of my electrical van in the direction in which lay this wonderful palace.

Having arrived, after much hard riding, at the entrance to his majesty's abode, I secured my van to a tree (to prevent its running away, I suppose). A sentinel at once challenged me with the password. It seemed that I replied: "Enter ye into the straight and narrow way,"

after which he allowed me to pass through the massive folding-doors which had now noiselessly opened to admit of my entrance.

I now thought I descended numerous flights of stairs of gold and silver. Having arrived at the ground floor, I was again accosted by a sentinel, who demanded the password. I replied: "All is not gold that glitters." After which he rang for a servant. A valet in gorgeous livery appeared and conducted me into the presence of his majesty, the King of the Druids. It seemed as though I was previously acquainted with this royal personage, for he extended his arms, saying: "Enter, noble prince of the Druids."

After having had dinner in a magnificent dining-room, all ablaze with gold and jewels, the king led me to his private apartments, stating he had something of importance to relate to me. I thought we seated ourselves in golden chairs at a table with a massive top of gold, laden with the choicest wines and cigars.

"My son," began the king, "what I have to relate to you is an important secret." I bowed respectfully. "It is this," continued he. "I am in love." I do not know why, but I thought this news produced quite an effect on me.

"The object of my affections," resumed his majesty, "is the fair daughter of a millionaire at Lima, whose name is C——" It seemed that I bounded to my feet with a loud cry.

The name he mentioned was identical to that borne by the girl to whom I was engaged to be married! "Sir," I replied, "this same man to whom you refer is the father of the girl to whom I am engaged. And, since he has but one daughter, the object of your affections must be my Mamie." This declaration enraged the king, who bounded forward with a fierce oath on his lips. "You," he hissed, "you dare to tell me that you are in love with this girl!"

"I can prove it," I replied.

"Then, by Heaven," stormed the king, "you shall not leave this place alive."

I thought he came toward me, and it seemed as if I detected murder in his eyes. Grasping me by the collar, he dragged me through the door, along a dark and narrow passage, and stopped at what appeared to be a black and yawning chasm.

I tried to resist, but I was powerless. I seemed to be immovable. I cried out again and again, but the only answer I received was the echo, which seemed to be, "You are doomed."

The king then gathered me in his arms, and, with a demoniacal laugh, hurled me into the gaping pit.

The light seemed to fade, and darkness reigned over all. I thought the fall had killed me. I felt that I was dead. Of a sudden I seemed to raise myself up, crying: "I will not die!" Then, with a sudden start, I awoke! At first I could scarcely realize that I was alive. All was darkness and silent as the tomb. I felt a dull aching in my head. My ideas were confused. I tried to rise, but my limbs were so stiff and sore that I sank back with a stifled groan.

"Where was I?" I asked myself. I felt about me; on two sides was a rough and jagged stonewall, before and behind me was space. I then felt for my clothing to

see if I was dressed. I was, and, fortunately, had a supply of matches in my pocket.

Striking one, I could discern by its sickly rays a long and narrow underground tunnel. Quick as a flash, the truth occurred to me. I was in an abandoned mine!

The next thing then was to get out of this place. By a superhuman effort I managed to gain my equilibrium. Once on my feet, I began a tremendous stamping to start my sluggish blood to circulating. I next took from my pocket some old letters, and, twisting them into a torch, lighted it. My confused thoughts slowly righted themselves and I knew that in my sleep I had entered an old mine.

By the aid of the torch I was enabled to see my way for a considerable distance. And, oh, horrors! right where I had lain was a wide, deep shaft. Glancing up, I perceived another tunnel. Then I knew that I had fallen from this passage above to the one below. I trembled at the thought that had I fallen into the shaft described, I would have met instant death.

I managed to climb to the upper passage, which I supposed was the main one.

On reaching this, I saw daylight ahead, and knew this was the surface tunnel.

As I walked along, the horror of my dream came back to me with fearful distinctiveness.

You may be sure that I was overjoyed on again seeing the light of day. The mine proved to be the one I had visited the day before.

That night I had really gotten up and dressed and visited the "underground palace," which proved to be an old gold mine. How I had gotten there, I never knew, unless the "electrical van" had been a street car. One thing, though, I lost no time in making my way down the mountains to the Hauser Boulevard and taking a car home. On reaching there I learned that it was 4 P. M., the eve of the next day after the night on which occurred "A Realistic Dream."

Caught by Indians.

(By Carmelo Quinta, Boston, Mass.)

I dreamed that my father was a rancher. He had one thousand cows and seven hundred and fifty horses, and also Winchester rifles, Colt revolvers and bowie knives. He also had saddles, gold mounted, and bridles. One afternoon I was riding out on the prairie with a bowie, two revolvers, and a repeating rifle hung on my saddle-horn, and a lariat. I had been riding for a dozen miles, when suddenly six Indians sprang upon me. They bound me up tightly. Then they searched me, but I was lucky. They did not search me in my coat sleeve where there was a little Derringer. They brought me to an Indian village. They gave me a buckskin coat and pants, also a bow and arrow. One day I was out hunting with an Indian boy, when I decided to escape. So I killed the boy. While I was getting ready to escape, I heard a voice saying, "We must find that boy or he'll get killed." I went to see who it was, and, to my surprise, I saw that it was an Indian and a negro. They were two scouts. Then they caught sight of me, and were just going to shoot me when I told them I was captured by Indians. They told me to go with them, but I told them the best way

was to send a troop of cavalry. Then they mounted and rode out of sight. When I came to the village it was dark. The first thing they asked me was where the Indian boy was. I told them he was killed by a bear. They bound me hard to a tree and they went to the spot where he was killed. In the night they did not return, for an Indian squaw came running over and said in broken-English that they were killed, wounded or captured by soldiers. I was glad when I heard that. One day a great big miner came up to me in some secret way and told me that my father would give a large amount of money if any one would bring me back to the ranch. He untied me and gave me a revolver. While he was giving it to me an Indian sprang upon him. I grabbed his revolver and fired. He fell dead. The other Indians heard the shot and ran to see who was shot. The miner and I went in hiding, and while they were looking at their dead comrade, we killed ten more.

When the Indians heard the shots they thought soldiers were nearby, and they ran off like rats, when they see a cat. While we were in hiding something struck me and my friend. We were unconscious. When we came to, we found ourselves inside a wigwam. The next day a troop of cavalry arrived with a piece of artillery, and they shot all the Indians in the village, and, afterward, I was free once more. I met my father at the fort, and while I was speaking with him, I awoke to find myself on the floor.

A Dream of Horseback Riding.

(By Charles E. Larrabee, Auburn, Me.)

One night I was feeling very tired, so I went to bed very early, and soon dropped asleep. That night I dreamed that I was out in front of my house riding on a horse, which was trying to throw me off. I could not jump off, so all I could do was to hang on to him. It seemed to me as though I was standing on my head. And, oh, how big my head felt when I awoke, and I was jumping up and down, crying for all I was worth. I screamed to my mother to take me off that horse, and she came and found me crying and told me it was only a dream. I was not on a horse, and I never wish to go through such an experience again. This is a true dream.

Chased by Catamounts.

(By Price Smith, Albany, Ga.)

I had been used to playing out every evening with a crowd of boys and girls. It was late one summer night when I was coming home. I saw something cross the street in front of me that looked like a catamount. As there was thought to be one in the vicinity, I started to run, and when I got home I was out of breath and frightened nearly to death. I undressed and got into bed as quickly as possible. The next thing I knew I was being chased by catamounts. I started running, and after a while I could see a hundred after me, instead of one. But there was nothing for me to do but keep running. Just as I had given myself up for lost, a figure, dressed in white, arose before me and motioned me to follow. As there was nothing else for me to do, I fol-

lowed the figure for about two hundred yards; when suddenly the earth seemed to open up and swallow us. When next I came to myself I was in what seemed to be a large cave. Strange figures surrounded me. In the center of the cave, upon a raised platform, on a toad-stool, sat the strangest figure I had ever seen. His head composed about three-fourths of his body, and for hair, live reptiles wriggled and twisted in every direction.

When he spoke it seemed like thunder. He said: "You have broken my law, therefore you shall die." As I was about to reply, I was seized by invisible hands and hurled through space. I felt myself sinking downward. At last, after what seemed an age to me, I struck something and awoke to find that I had fallen off the bed. It was morning, and the sun was shining through the window.

That cured me of staying out late at night.

A Lucky Dream.

(By Arno Thompson, Detroit, Mich.)

The dream I am about to relate occurred last month. The day had been unusually hot and I felt very tired, so when night came I went to bed early. As soon as my head touched the pillow I fell asleep.

Pretty soon I dreamed I was standing on the dock just ready to dive in with some other boys, when a boy asked me for a cigarette. I asked him to wait till I dived, but he persisted till I gave him it.

When I came back the boys had dived and were sucked under by a current.

The next day the very same things happened to me with the exception that no boy asked me for a cigarette, and that the boys were saved, and this time in reality.

As for me, I was just going in when I thought of the dream, and stayed out. Now I am glad I stayed out, for I might not have been saved. I have had some lucky dreams, but this is the luckiest.

Window Breaking.

(By Leo L. Richards, Dorchester, N. B.)

One night I had a curious dream about a big animal that I could not get out of the door. I tried and tried to put it out, but I could not do it. So I went upstairs and tore off the piece of moulding that keeps the window in place, and I got the animal out. After that I again went downstairs, unlocked the door, and went out and stood in the street looking up and down it to try if I could see the animal, but I could not, so I went to bed, and the next morning I found I had opened the door and broke off the moulding, but I was greatly frightened, I must admit.

GOLDEN HOURS

Boys, have you any numbers of Golden Hours? If so, see if the following are among them: 134, 135, 156, 166, 167, 168, 169 to 192, 296, 389. I will pay liberal prices.

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